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# Patricia Panlilio

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homes

# Out of the ORDINARY

The home of this Cebrano couple shows their design, creativity and style.

*Margot Enriquez stops by for a visit*

The terrace is quirky because of its overcasted furniture and green, interesting slopes, industrial material and ceramic tiles



Cebuano furniture designer Debbie Villagracia was 13 years old when she created the sets for a high-school play with a cast of 60. Drawing came naturally to her that the found it strange if people weren't drawn. In adulthood, however, she played safe by becoming an accountant and married Tim Páez, who worked in a financial company in Cebu. Guy wanted to leave his own business to offer work, he investigated a subcontractor for export furniture.

When the couple wanted out of the corporate world, they decided to follow their dreams by putting up their furniture business, Design Ventures, with Tim as the chairman and Debbie as the managing and creative director.

Cebu has been the home for furniture and accessories that cater to the high-end spectrum of the international market. Design Ventures made its foray by going against the tide. While mass furniture makers were producing stone-inlaid woods, the couple substituted ceramic tiles. They invested a kilos and came up with ceramic, mosaic-patterned cables that were snapped up by buyers from the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan. As the company's morale grew, it started exhibiting in foreign shows and expanded its market to the British, Portuguese and the Hispanic countries.

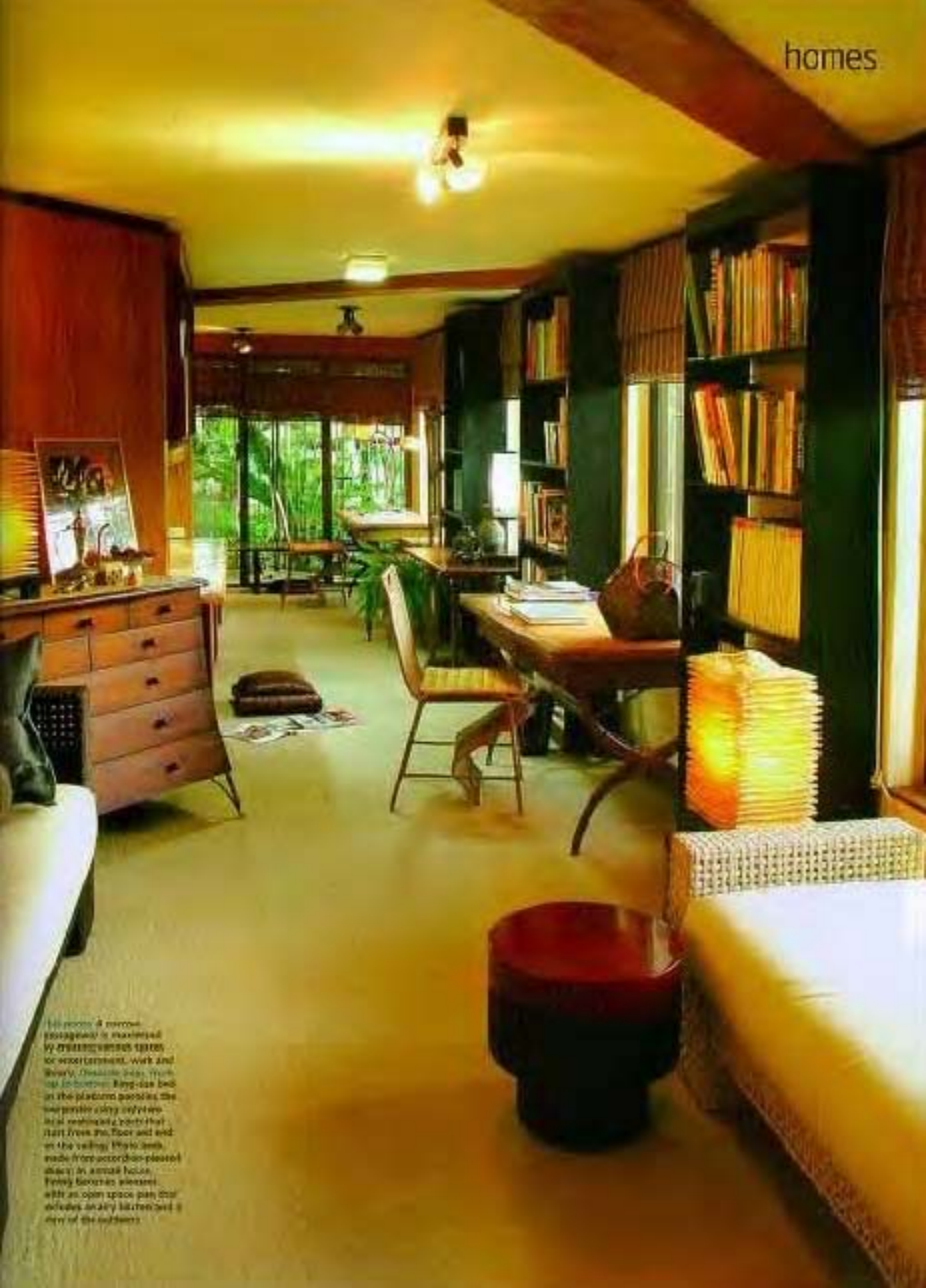
"I had been following the trends, yet I wanted to produce something that the world market wanted but has not seen yet," says Debbie.

The Palaos jest that their home in Cebu's tony Maria Luisa subdivision is the showroom of their latest collection. Yet, it looks comfortable because the decorative style shows Debbie's idiosyncrasies

The best collection featured bamboo inlays. The early designs used big bamboos that evoked a rustic look. "Bamboos produce a strong visual impact because of their volume; it's challenging to make patterns from them," says Debbie.

Eventually, small bamboos offered many artistic possibilities. They could be squared or rounded, cut lengthwise or crosswise, opened up to show their interiors or cut into fine pieces to suggest vein patterns, thus making their furniture inlays out of the ordinary. With its reputation for intrepidness, the company has for soiled wood-and-iron chairs with woven backings and its signature ceramic tables with wrought-iron legs for hotels in Australia and Spain. Today, Debbie is fascinated with metal as furniture material and also aimed with copper wires for soft furnishings.

The Palaos jest that their home in Cebu's tony Maria Luisa subdivision is the showroom of their latest collection. Yet, it looks comfortable because the decorative style shows Debbie's idiosyncrasies. Grouped together, Debbie's furniture and accessory designs reveal her love for creating textures and deep colors and her active imagination. She draws inspiration from inspirations. Her table lamps are laden with springs, evoking memories of the spiral binding of Selwyn's notebooks from her student days. Another lamp parodies the bottle of Absolut vodka, made from laminated plywood strips and resin circles that resemble bubbles. A top-seller is a lamp uniquely shaped like a pot and covered with copper wires from electric sockets. Several bar stools, made from rattan strips, suggest the curves of a woman's torso. A two-seater, made from plastic tubing, conjures the shape of a cloud and the experience of sitting on one. The split bamboo inlays become Argyle patterns on the dining table. The modernist of the furniture is offset by antiques and



This room's narrow passageway is maximised by three different zones for entertainment, work and study. The table also functions as a platform for the large, suspended city skyline. The red, cylindrical ottoman that sits on the floor and sits on the ceiling. The ottoman, made from accordion-pleated fabric, is a small piece of furniture that becomes a piece of art with an open space that defines an airy, bright and a view of the outdoors.

This photo: Various applications of bamboo inlays, laminations, veneers, and lighted slats joined with abaca lingo. The dining table is a play on patterns and brush marks for texture. **Suzanne Ping:** The house is meant to be enjoyed at night with its lighting design. **Inset:** Beneath the stairwell are the entertainment centre and a laminated bamboo table that display a collection of medical instruments.





Debbie's accumulation of gewgaws such as bells, old-fashioned hairpins, ethnic instruments, angels and candelabras from foreign vacations.

Debbie's eclecticism is established at the porch with an old trunk (antique chair with wide arm rests) combined with modern bamboo-inlaid furniture and tribal totem poles, both designed by Debbie St John and St Peter carved on antique chapel doors greet the visitors as they enter the multi-level house. Debbie salvaged wood from her grandfather's ancestral home such as *molave* and the rare *hahayang* for the flooring of the foyer and landing. Souvenirs from travels, such as a painting bought during the couple's long walk in Spain and stone figurines from Africa, match Debbie's bamboo-inlaid/cassole lit by ball lights and iron overick eggs, a *shawl* from an Alberto Giacometti design.

The stairwell makes a statement—no nobs to distract the eye, open stringers, a giant ceramic-framed mirror to emphasize height, and an entertainment centre and display area below the stairs to avoid dead space. The music

player is kept in a cabinet of traditional *laminat* with modern metal sheets and silver-leaf finished doors.

A night person, Debbie says the house is in its element in the evening, lit by cozy ambient lights in strategic places. "We can't wear lights from the ceiling—too antiseptic and cold," says Gus. The living room is enclosed by a low ceiling for a snug feeling. A wall mirror, with a gold-leaf occasion which Debbie learned in South Africa enlarges the space and bounces the light. A surprise element is a display wall that turns out to be a revolving door to the couple's bedroom. The living room puts on view modern seats and chairs, using *shuca* and elongated *lapepi*. Debbie's copper wire-framed sofa; and her Ali Baha wood, whose seats are protrusions of excess *hambobo*.

The open space plan presents the kitchen with ceramic tile walls, a vestige of Debbie's *Visitors*' post collection, and the dining area facing the terrace. The dining space consists of a *regimade* that doubles as a buffet table and wooden chair with rope backing, abaci waffle seat and woven *rima* surrounding the Philippine mahogany dining table. One chair features two sloping legs that

## 'Design is a play for Debbie,' remarks Gus on his wife's unconventional approach to design "It's like, 'Why not?'"

contrast with the two front straight legs, characteristic of Debbie's quirkiness.

The organic look of the house is offset by the industrial character of the bakery, which is arranged with lightwood furniture made from surplus construction materials such as plastic tubing and leather.

The basement's conversion into a study was an afterthought. "When we entered the furniture business, Debbie needed a place to relax. She likes this place so she could enjoy looking at the greenery outside," says Gus. It is a multi-purpose area for connecting, working, reading or just chilling out. *Visitors* are fascinated with Debbie's desk of stretched leather, framed with among the distal *magreng* ornaments the laminated bamboo-inlaid plywood stool that doubles as a side table; and her accordion-plated lamp, made from *shuca*.

The place leaves an overall impression of the owner's individuality. "Design is a play for Debbie," remarks Gus on his wife's unconventional approach to design. "It's like, 'Why not?'" □