

Maker Monday: An ASPIRE Exclusive Interview With Sylvie Johnson

Some of us are born into a career, others have that sudden, jostling epiphany that guides them into one. For Sylvie Johnson, the latter is the case. Known as "the refined designer's source for textiles" Johnson's weaving and winding of textiles can be found throughout the world. Her work starts with finding the perfect quality fibers, which she then envisions as intricate yet robust patterns. You can find Sylvie's works in architect's Annabelle Selldorf and Peter Marino projects and in major publications such as Business of Home, Veranda, and now ASPIRE DESIGN AND HOME. Introducing this week's Maker Monday, Merida's Artistic Director, Sylvie Johnson.



Inspired by the Italian Renaissance and the Ottoman Empire, this intriguing weave is part of Merida's Atelier 2020 collection. Consisting of natural yarns such as mohair and thick-felted wool, this pattern carries itself across the strong foundation of linen and alpaca.

Andrew Joseph: What are three words to describe where you live?

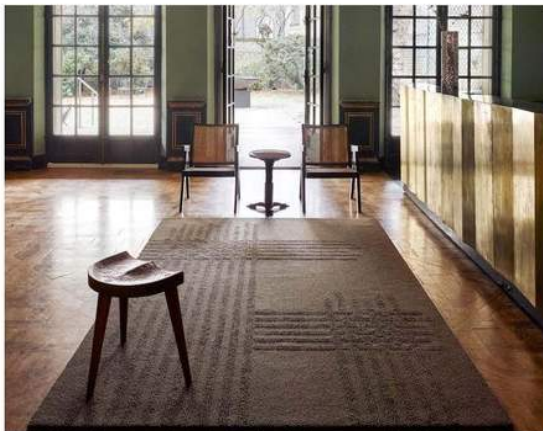
Sylvie Johnson: For me, Paris is the city of discoveries. Culture: all the museums that I love and where I'm spending most of my time. Architecture and landscape: There are so many amazing buildings from different periods, beautiful gardens and parks. Gastronomy: One of the best cuisines in the world with incredible chefs and a variety of organic products made for centuries with the same quality.

Andrew: What are three things you can't live without?

Sylvie: Books: library at the office and at home. I'm surrounded by books about art, architecture, design, textiles, poetry, gardens and novels. I'm reading every day about different subjects.

Notebooks: I take notes all the time with ideas, to-do lists or sketches. I have a huge number of notebooks.

Music: I like to listen to music at home, lots of classic piano, sometime opera (love Maria Callas), jazz and some pop.



Laid carefully here is the Verona rug included in the Atelier 2020 collection. It contains rich earth tones that take inspiration from Renaissance paintings. It carefully puts an emphasis on the natural yarns and techniques found throughout the rug. Photo via Richard Powers.

Andrew: How would you define your work in three words

Sylvie: Poetry & Art: to create something that will last. I start with natural yarn. The yarn can tell different stories based on the colors, the design and the weaving.

Technique: lots of rigor in weaving. I practice often and create a process where innovation and quality are key.

Meaningful: the natural materials we use at Merida, the craftsmen that making the rugs in Fall River, MA, the spirit that we put into those rugs.

Andrew: A book that everyone should read?

Sylvie: *Praise of the Shadow* from Tanizaki Junichiro (1933). A masterpiece about beauty.

Andrew: How do you define beauty?

Sylvie: Beauty is a reflection of thoughts. Beauty is the way things are made more than the artistry. It's about the layers that will create shadows. As I often say, for me beauty is hope of possibilities.



The deep purple stair runner is the Partsi from the all-new Atelier Collection. It provides a dramatic and luxurious element to any given space, while endowing it with a sense of nobility.

Andrew: What are some creative ways that you have kept yourself busy during quarantine?

Sylvie: At Merida, I made a series of talks about creation and the essence of beauty using some of my art and cultural references. It was very special. We focused on beauty and feeding ourselves with something bigger than us: art & culture. Also, we went back to study some rugs from our latest Atelier collection.



Although Merida has an exquisite selection of rugs, they also allow for their customers to completely customize. From changing the colors, yarn type, and even reimaging patterns, the consumer has full creative freedom on creating their perfect rug.

Andrew: Where will be the first place you will travel to after COVID-19?

Sylvie: I'll be back in Fall River, our workshop where the magic happens.

Andrew: Has your mindset changed into 2021? In what ways?

Sylvie: Beauty heals.



About The Maker | Sylvie Johnson, the self-taught weaver whose masterworks can be seen in King Mohammed VI's Ozymandian hotel in Morocco, is the trusted go-to textile source for the world's top architects, including Annabelle Selldorf and Peter Marino. She's now heading the textile design house and material driven rug brand, Merida's creative department as the Artistic Director.

Johnson is a Paris Institute of Political Studies graduate and former public service bureaucrat. Before stepping into her role, the Senegal-born, Paris resident's ascent into the art scene happened rather accidentally. While on vacation in Brittany, France, Johnson stumbled into an exhibition and instantly fell in love with the textiles on display. Soon afterwards, she decided to take a year off to learn how to weave. Her career in textiles began with her asking to be an apprentice for a couturier who had previously worked for Christian Lacroix and Chanel. Later, she founded her own Parisian atelier and this small-batch shop earned her the reputation of "the refined designer's source for textiles."