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Living etc

THE HOMES MAGAZINE FOR MODERN LIVING



AOL Keyword: Living

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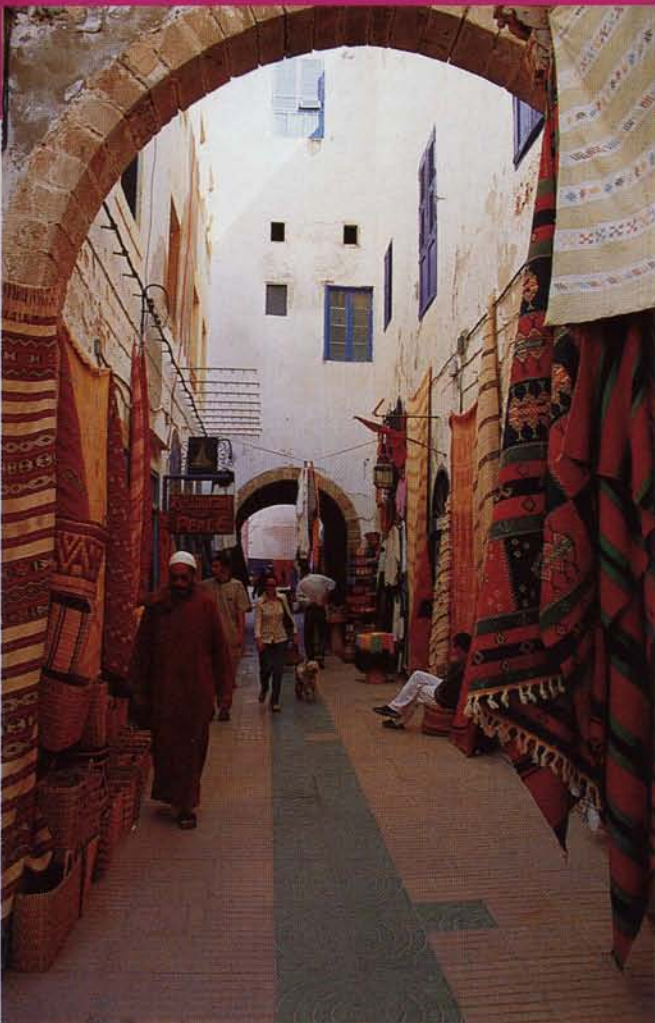
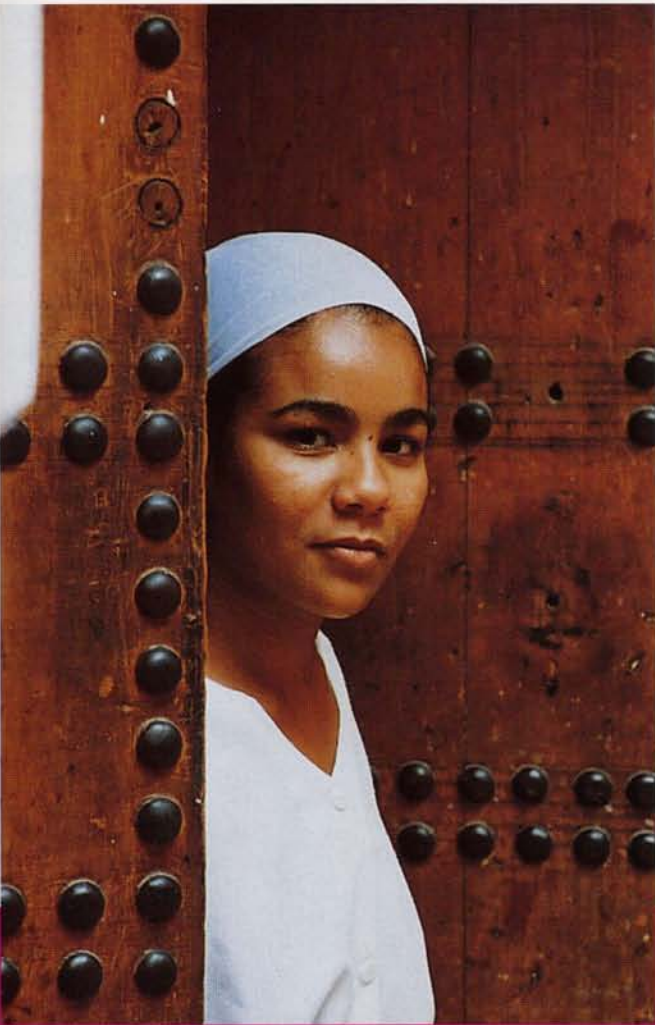
RIGHT A typically Moroccan ornate tiled courtyard at Riad Enija, just one of the traditional guesthouses in Marrakech.
CENTRE TOP Most Riads have studded wooden doors.
CENTRE BOTTOM An alleyway in nearby Essaouira.

Stunning courtyards, bustling souks and thrilling sounds and colours at every turn: no wonder marvellous Marrakech gets under your skin

Words and photography
Paul Miles



MAROC star



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
Fashionable bar and restaurant
Le Comptoir is where the cool people hang out. The thick wall of the medina at the hippy seaside

haunt of Essaouira protects against pounding waves on stormy days. After shopping till you drop in the bustling souks, relax with a cup of sweet mint tea in a tea glass.

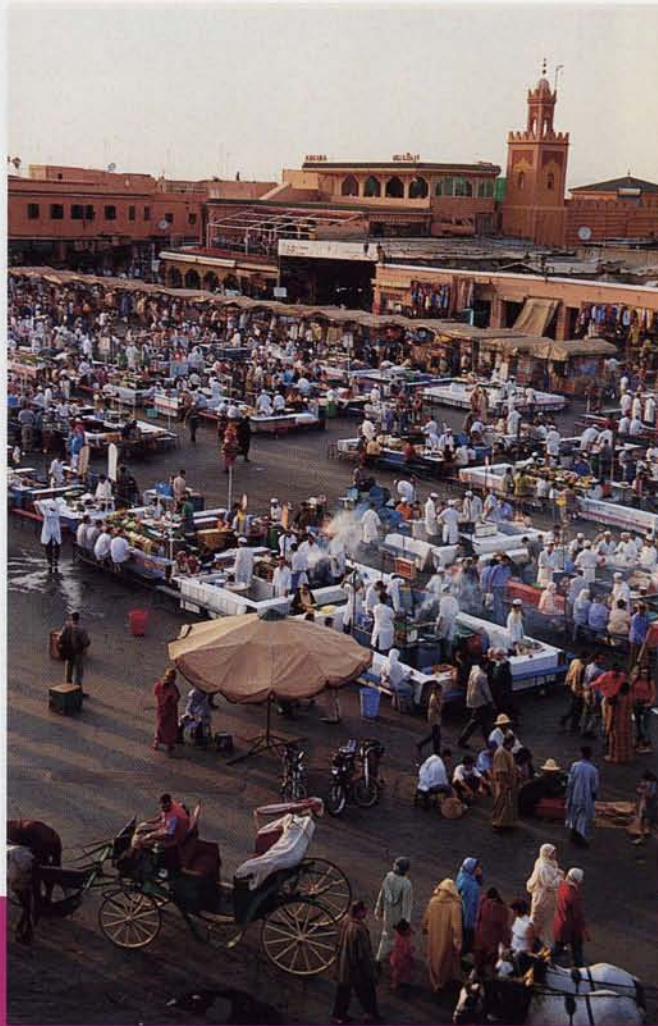
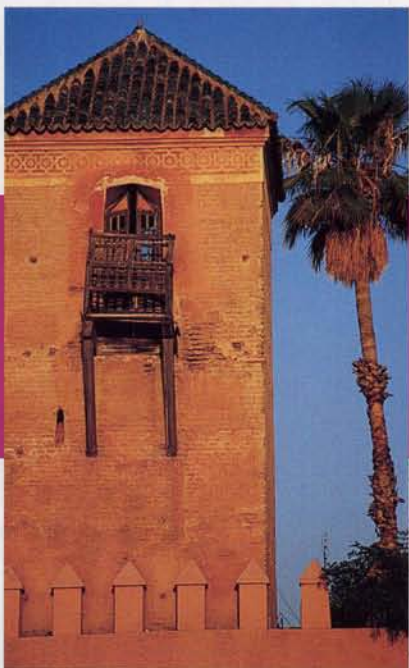
arrakech has always been an exotic kind of a place. Maybe it's because the Moroccan city of a million people first developed as a medieval trading post. Perched on a plateau in the desert, it was an ancient meeting point for merchants from Timbuctu, Egypt and southwest Europe dealing in cotton, gold, salt, slaves and spices.

Today, the city still bustles with sights and sounds that feel as though they've fallen out of a history book. Artisans and traders through the narrow streets of the walled medina, as the old town is called. Donkey-drawn carts laden with carpets or piles of cured camel skins weave through crowds in narrow, shady lanes. A man with bundles of fresh mint under his arm hurries past, the fragrance of the herb following him through the maze of alleys.

But it's not just those looking for a bargain at the souk who are crowding to Marrakech. In the last few years, it's become the destination of choice for the fashionable and famous. Jean Paul Gaultier, Giorgio Armani, P Diddy and a host of other celebrities have all visited. Some have even bought and renovated houses in the medina and decorated the rooms with mosaics, polished plaster, kilims and lanterns. These traditional courtyard houses, which, from the outside, are unprepossessing with their high walls and large studded doors, are called riads. They offer a peaceful sanctuary away from the noise >>

BELOW Snap up intricate metalwork lanterns at one of Morocco's many souks. RIGHT Make like a true Marrakechi

with a glass of freshly squeezed OJ. BELOW RIGHT Marrakech's city walls. BOTTOM Magic carpets: more souk buys.



SOUK IT UP: TEN MUST-BUYS TO PICK UP IN MARRAKECH

Thuya wood bowls – beautifully grained, warm-coloured wood.

Carpets – small silk carpets to hang on walls or a large cotton one for the living room. Prices range from a few pounds to several hundred.

Slippers (babouches) – in leather or silk.

Lanterns and lamps – intricate metalwork lanterns that can be used with candles or bulbs; lamps with camel-skin shades.

Ceramics – hand-painted plates, pots, bowls and drums.

Spices – black pepper and mixed spices for tagines.

Argan oil – a delicious nutty oil, also used in cosmetics.

Incense – Berber incense and burners.

Jewellery – Berber jewellery, either modern reproductions or antique silver, coral and amber works of art.

Mosaic table tops – or complete tables with wrought-iron legs.

WHERE TO GET THE LOOK HERE

Kazzbar 07733 070577 www.kazzbar.co.uk

Maroc Decor 020 8742 3911.

Talisman Trading 020 8896 1881.

ABOVE Jemaa el Fna, Marrakech's magical main square, is crammed with stalls selling

all manner of delicious food. THIS PICTURE The lamp-lit pool at stylish Marrakech hotel Caravanserai.





and bustle of the lanes, which, although often too narrow for cars, can be hectic with pedestrians, mopeds, bicycles and mules.

Spending lazy days in a tranquil riad is as cosy as curling up in front of a roaring log fire on a wet winter's day. Indeed, most riads – some of which are now guesthouses, or can be rented – have open fires for chilly winter nights as well as a shady central courtyard, filled with palms and orange trees around a fountain, in which to escape summer's heat. It would be possible to spend a long weekend sinking into silk cushions without once venturing out. Riad Kaiss is especially cosy, while Dar Les Cigognes has a

roof terrace with views of the old pink walls of a neighbouring royal palace. Here, storks nest on turrets, while calèches – horse-drawn carriages – clatter along the road below.

But, if you can drag yourself out of the comfort zone, one of the best things to do in Marrakech is to wander through the many souks and shops. You can find everything from herbal cures for insomnia to silk carpets, as well as everyday fare – fruit, vegetables, meat and spices, clothes,

GET IN TOUCH

STAY Dar Les Cigognes 00 212 44 38 27 40; www.lescigognes.com.

Riad Kaiss 00 212 44 44 01 41; www.riadkaiss.com; riad@riadkaiss.com.

Caravanserai 00 212 44 30 03 02 www.caravanserai.com.

Riad Enija 00 212 44 44 09 26.

EAT Le Comptoir 00 212 44 43 77 02.

GO Specialist operator: Best of Morocco 01380 828533; www.realmorocco.com.

CONTACT Moroccan National Tourist Office 020 7437 0073; www.visitmorocco.com.

Spend a magical evening in atmospheric Jemaa el Fna enthralled by acrobats, traditional musicians, snake charmers and storytellers



TOP LEFT Don't forget to visit Yves St Laurent's striking tropical Majorelle Gardens. **MIDDLE LEFT Seafood stalls**

at Jemaa el Fna, under a dusky sky. **BOTTOM LEFT For blissful luxury and modern Moroccan style, head to the Caravanserai hotel.**

shoes. The back alleys of the metalwork souk are an other-worldly scene. Goggled men with welding torches crouch over work, sparks flying; radios pump out house music, boys bash metal sheets with hammers, and chickens scratch about. In the souks, haggling is expected and part of the fun.

Most of the time, you can expect to pay half or less of the asking price, especially in the morning. Storekeepers will sit you down with a glass of mint tea as they explain the different qualities of leather slippers or hand-woven carpets. Don't take everything as gospel truth...

There's more to see than souks, of course. You can admire the exquisite tiles and carved stucco of the Saadian tombs or wander around Yves St Laurent's tropical Majorelle Gardens, where cacti stand proud against vivid blue walls. And don't forget a visit to the tanneries, with their vile vats of pigeon guano curing slippery skins of sheep and camels.

At the end of a day shopping and sightseeing, head to the atmospheric Jemaa el Fna, Marrakech's 'big square'. Here you can spend a magical evening enthralled by acrobatic troupes, musicians, snake charmers and storytellers. Squeeze onto a bench to enjoy a bowl of harira soup for a few pence and you'll feel like a real Marrakechi. Or, if you prefer something more chic, head to Le Comptoir, a hip and funky Moroccan restaurant.

After a few days in Marrakech, you may feel like blowing the craziness out of your hair. If so, there are day trips to the Atlas mountains or you can hire a 'grand taxi' to take you to the coast. Essaouira, a laid-back fishing port with Portuguese colonial buildings, artists galore and bustling harbourside stalls, is just two-and-a-half hours away. A swathe of sandy beach is where locals play football and men stroll in hooded cloaks (jellabas). It's all so relaxed and beautiful, it's easy to see why, back in the Sixties, the town was a real hippy haunt. And when you start to miss the craziness, simply hit the road back to Marrakech again... □

