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## >>> Casa Nova, Santa Fe, New Mexico

**D**ESIGN PROFESSIONALS ARE always looking both forward and backward to put a fresh stamp on their projects. And with a global community to draw from, there's more

fodder for inspiration than ever. The classic aesthetics of the Orient and Africa, which play well in contemporary styling, have recently emerged as inspiration for designers.

Combining those two aesthetics in Santa Fe, New Mexico is a new showroom called Casa Nova, located in the historic Railyard District on Guadalupe Street. Owner Natalie Fitz-Gerald's vision was to pair her longtime affection for collecting African tribal art and textiles with an acquired interest in Japanese ceramics and furnishings, thanks to her former husband, Greg Fitz-Gerald. They also began, as Fitz-Gerald explains, "nibbling on more sculptural contemporary ceramics."

A collector is always collecting, and that led to her newest venture. As young as Casa Nova is, it already has a following among architects and interior designers. Fitz-Gerald is showcasing not only the arts of Africa, but Japanese ceramics, along with other handsome artist-made contemporary tabletop accessories.

Even though Fitz-Gerald is South African, her interest in African tribal art didn't just come with the territory. She was one of the first women to be admitted to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (and still holds her seat there). Instead, it developed more slowly, with an introduction to the arts and crafts of her homeland. "There was to be a major collection on exhibit, and I missed it because I was overseas," she says. "So I tracked down the collection's owner to find out if it was possible to see it. He invited me to tea to learn more about African art, and at the end of our visit gave me my first two pieces." They became close friends, and when he passed away, he also passed on his collection to Fitz-Gerald.

That began her odyssey as a collector. She says wryly of herself, "I'm a diseased collector. I have to collect. One time, I bought a piece from a dealer and he asked me, 'Do you know where you're going to put it?' I said, yes, definitely—in the closet. There literally wasn't room anywhere else." A few years ago, a 40-foot container shipment of African tribal art went into a large closet downstairs (most would call it a mini-warehouse) that contained everything from beadwork and textiles to wood carvings and much more in her remodeled Santa Fe home. As she explains, "I rotated collections all the time, and when they 'come out of the closet', it's like greeting old friends."

Now, Fitz-Gerald has a bigger "closet" at Casa Nova.





Clockwise from above:  
A vignette at Casa Nova  
features the show-  
room's mix of Asian and  
African influences.

The showroom  
prominently features  
ceramics. Owner Natalie  
Fitz-Gerald. Photography  
by Peter Vitale.



Nutshell

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HIDDEN TREASURES



She has incorporated her interests into a fusion, she says, of art, culture and living.

Casa Nova's tableware melds contemporary and ethnic influences.

Among the wonderful treasures she has begun to spotlight are antique Chinese creations, such as antique dressers, and Japanese kotatsu (a small wood grid table with a glass top), and an antique Japanese merchant's door resting on a tansu chest. Recently, her showroom featured a low Javanese teak coffee table, a Philippine folk art birthing bench, as well as ceramics of Asian and Italian artistry and handcrafted, artist-made pewter and stainless flatware.

She also displays the patterned African grass textiles called Kuba cloth. Galleries and collectors often mount the Kuba cloth as framed art, but these textiles also find their way into accent pillows and bed coverings. The stark African black-and-white mud cloth also creates a dramatic statement when used as wall coverings, accent pillows and other details.

The carved wood of Africa is legendary, and Fitz-Gerald features Zulu milk pails, each a unique and personal work in wood sculpture. The Zulu regard their cows as sacred, and perhaps they wanted the cows to see their appreciation by having a work of art in which to give their milk.

"The key," says Fitz-Gerald, "is that however artistic and beautiful, these things should be held, touched and used." Art only adds to the enjoyment. ■

*Casa Nova, 530 S. Guadalupe St., Santa Fe, NM; (505) 983-8558.*

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