

# A small, beautiful, world of decor



VICKY SANDERSON  
AROUND THE  
HOUSE

For homeowners who enjoy great design, increasingly connected global trade is a good thing.

Take, for example, the "Modern India" collection Calgary-based designer Aly Velji [www.alyveljidesigns.com](http://www.alyveljidesigns.com) created for Mobilia [www.mobilia.ca](http://www.mobilia.ca).

It all began over a lunch Velji had with Mobilia executives, to whom he'd been introduced by border-hopping designer and uber-influencer Janette Ewen. During the conversation, he shared that despite having roots there, he'd had never been to India, where the company frequently sources product.

Fast forward a few months, and Velji was in India to view prototypes for a seven-piece capsule collection he'd designed for the family-owned Canadian furniture and décor retailer.

"Once I got there, I was so inspired by what I saw," says Velji. "The craftsmanship, the hand-scraping of huge teak and rosewood architectural salvage, and the gorgeous marbles! I happened to see a weaving technique and said it would perfect for a lighting fixture. So we designed a hanging pendant on the fly."

Velji also tweaked existing designs by manufacturers with whom Mobilia worked — adding brass elements, or changing heights or finishes — and the collection soon swelled to 15 pieces, all of which are in stores now.

Casa Cubista began while designer Arren Williams (who was born in Britain) was on sabbatical in Portugal with his husband David Pimentel, who grew up in an Azorean-



A bird-cage fixture and woven bench were among items added to Velji's collection.

Canadian family of weavers, bakers and woodworkers.

Friends introduced them to a brother and sister who were hand-making tiles in traditional yellows and blues. For fun, Williams and Pimentel asked if they could do something in a more modern, monochromatic palette.

"They were surprised by how good it looked, so we decided to do some patterns with a local potter. We started to get some interest — it just grew organically as we met more craftspeople."

Grew organically is a modest way of saying Casa Cubista's hand-thrown, hand-painted ceramics can now be found in Le Bon Marché in Paris, and in Berlin, Palm Springs, London, Berlin, and Brussels, as well as Saudade



Aly Velji put a contemporary lens on traditional Indian design motifs.

Toronto [www.saudadetoronto.com](http://www.saudadetoronto.com) — one of the city's prettiest shops and which, conveniently, does online sales across North America.

Williams thinks the rising popularity of hand-crafted home-goods is a fascination with the story behind the product, along with a growing awareness that craft can be contemporary, versatile, and handsome.

"For people outside of Portugal it's amazing to hold a plate that was made by a person rather than a machine. It becomes a little piece of history that adds to the idea of the well-travelled home," says Williams.

Casa Cubista also works with a family-owned woolen mill that recycle threads from Porto's fashion industry and spins it into yarn that's woven into their line of rugs, which are distributed across North America by Renwil (contact [www.renwil.com](http://www.renwil.com) for retail availability)

Snob Stuff [www.snobstuff.com](http://www.snobstuff.com) was started in 2007 by South-African born Denise Zidel. After emigrating to Canada, she began, during frequent trips home, to notice "all the textures and colours I had forgotten and not seen in Canada."

"When I first started going back, I was in awe of the artisans and amazing craftspeople. But they were so focused on making things for the tourist market. The skill sets were there but not often the aesthetics. And there were so many projects they thought would translate into long-term relationship, but companies would move onto the next trend or design," says Zidel.

Zidel took a different approach, slowly building up trust between herself and tradespeople; and focusing on sourcing interesting, colourful, and exceptionally-made décor and furniture.

Twelve years later, Zidel oversees a thriving shop in Toronto's east end that caters to a large local and online consumer, designer and commercial clientele. Along the way, she became the North American distributor for Zenza lighting, a line of gorgeous pierced metal fixtures made in Egypt.

Speaking of international connections, Zenza itself was born some 25 years ago when a Dutch woman met an Egyptian man on vacation, proving once again how cross-cultural pollination yields beautiful results.

*— Vicky Sanderson is the editor of Around the House [www.aroundthehouse.ca](http://www.aroundthehouse.ca). Follow her on Instagram @athwithvicky, on Twitter @ATHwithVicky and on FB at [www.facebook.com/ATHWithVicky](http://www.facebook.com/ATHWithVicky).*



Romance and detail are blended in Zenza's lighting.



Handcrafted decor prevents a home from looking soulless, says Williams.