

High above the Pacific Coast, Franca and Marco Brignone built a Mexican getaway as dramatic as its setting.

casa fantastica



Returning home from lunch at his brother's cliff-top house, Marco Brignone describes watching a squadron of pelicans glide past at eye level. "To think you can see that while sitting at your dining table," he marvels, hands sweeping like birds through the air. "It was *fantástico!*"

No less fantastic than Casa Candelabros, one of several houses Marco and his wife, Franca, have



built in Careyes. Set in splendid isolation on the rugged Pacific Coast between Puerto Vallarta and Manzanillo, Careyes is a realm of azure coves and jungle-clad hills dotted with structures that conjure a castaway's dream. Marco's artistically inclined brother, Gian Franco, discovered this stretch of coast in 1968 and bought a huge, pristine parcel. Since then he has presided

TEXT BY JEFF BOOK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOMINIQUE VORILLON | STYLING BY JOHN COSTELLO

“People can’t appreciate this place until they feel the air and hear the music and swim in the sea.” —Franca Brignone

Driftwood mimicking the form of native cacti adorns the broad terrace flowing from the thatched living room. Below: Mexican tableware and rustic *equipa* chairs complement the dining room.



over it like Merlin the wizard, as the Brignones and others fashioned dramatic homes that embody *la dolce vita* that they celebrate at home in Italy.

Designed around towering old specimens of the multiarmed cactus for which it’s named, Casa Candelabros merges with the sultry seaside environment. In the much-admired style of this coast, colorful plaster walls and lofty thatched roofs deflect the dazzling sunlight, while broad openings and glass-free windows welcome cooling



winds. Palm-trunk columns girdled in strangler vines seem rooted in place. Flowing from walls and floors, plaster platforms fitted with bright cushions serve as beds and banquettes. Chairs and tables carved from tropical hardwoods resemble functional sculptures. Arabesques of inlaid black pebbles embellish the weatherproof concrete floor. The result is at once modern and timeless.

Mexico City–based architect Jean-Claude Galibert tailored the six-bedroom villa to its hill-

“When people talk about this coast, the two words they use the most are ‘paradise’ and ‘magic.’ ” —Marco Brignone



Vivid fabrics and a pebble design in the concrete floor set off a chair hewn from a single piece of native wood (above). Right: A tree motif decorates the built-in headboard of a platform bed.



top site. “Early on we came here with my brother to study the view and the angle of the sun,” Marco explains. “With that we modified the design, which is much easier when you have so few doors and windows.” The result differs radically from the Brignones’ house in Italy, which Franca calls “a normal house, with antiques and contemporary art.” But after all, Marco observes, “They’re two different worlds and two different ways of living. I never drink a margarita in Italy, but I always drink them here. You should enjoy the best of a country when you’re in that country.” Franca agrees. “When we’re here,” she says, “I leave my watch off.”

Marco loves to fish in the Pacific, trolling up the coast and stopping for a swim along the way. “Here, I am always relaxed,” he says. “In this house I feel very well.” Friends and family—including the couple’s four grown children—also like to escape to Careyes.

“Our friends who visit may have seen photos,” Franca says, “but people can’t appreciate this place until they feel the air and hear the music and swim in the sea.” Outside, guests who’ve just arrived from Italy lounge on a sunny patio, looking happily dazed by jet lag and the tropical surroundings. They admire the infinity-edge pool that borders the property’s seaward fringe like a luxuriant oxymoron, a welcoming moat. Embedded in the patio near a sleek black-concrete fountain stands a gnarly chunk of driftwood, its bleached branches casting jagged shadows. Amid rock outcrops and

“Here, I am always relaxed.” —Marco Brignone



Coral-color plaster walls curve around corners, enclosing private rooms, patios, and planters. A hammock hangs from columns outside a guest room.

the eponymous cacti, rounded exterior corners enhance the sensual design.

“When people talk about this coast, the two words they use most are ‘paradise’ and ‘magic,’” Marco muses. “That’s what we’re looking for in our lives, and you can find them both here.” At the party Franca and Marco threw to celebrate completion of the house, they had



120 guests, candles everywhere, and mariachis playing from the balcony. “It was really”—that word again—“magic,” he says. As for paradise? “My brother has lived here a long time,” Marco notes. “After years of visiting, I understand what someone once said to him: ‘I hope heaven won’t be a disappointment for you.’” 🌿

More info: page 210