

SPRING/SUMMER 2015
COMPLIMENTARY

1879

BY BIRKS

NICE ICE

OUR FAVOURITE
ENGAGEMENT RINGS

CARTAGENA'S
new
cool

WATCHES

as works of art

LIZ TAYLOR'S
LOVE AFFAIR
with VAN CLEEF
& ARPELS

MIAMI HEAT

*The rebirth of a
city of style*

HOT NEW
HOTELS AND
HIDEOUTS



COMPASS

NY CARTAGENA

With its romantic streetscapes, electrifying colours and new influx of trendsetters, the Colombian city has never been more alive

TEXT Irma Martinez / PHOTOGRAPHS Maya Visneyi



Seafood restaurants inspired by the cuisine of the north coast are abundant in Cartagena. Left: an historic seawall surrounds the old city



Miami-based celebrity stylist **Irma Martínez** is founder and creative director of the lifestyle company *Trendy Inc.* Her clients include actors and musicians, notably *Sofía Vergara, Shakira, Ricky Martin, Enrique Iglesias, Daisy Fuentes, Pitbull, Marc Anthony, Eva Longoria* and *Gloria Estefan.*

C

ARTAGENA IS ONE of the most beautiful cities in the world. It's almost 500 years old—the first Spanish colony in the Americas—and a place that's managed to constantly develop, adding contemporary restaurants, bars and hotels without

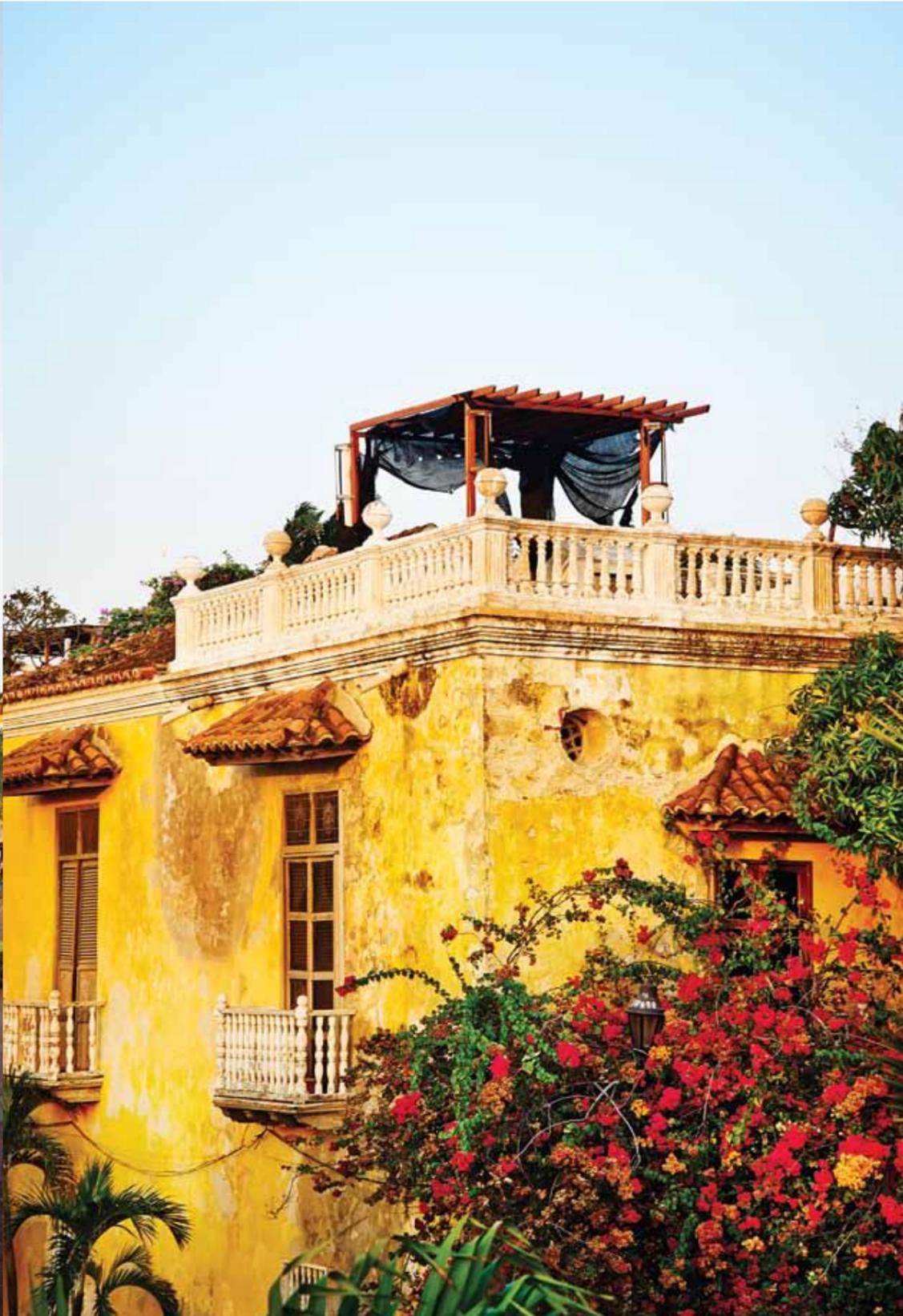
sacrificing its historic architecture and gilded monuments. The mix of cultures is incredible. It's gone from the little place where I grew up to a booming, cosmopolitan city.

When I was very young, Cartagena didn't buzz like it does today. It had the feel of a small town. I could play in the streets with my friends and go for walks around town without my parents worrying about where we were. I loved the sense of fun and freedom. I left Colombia to attend university in the United States. I always intended to go back, but met my now husband (Enrique), fell in love, got married and settled into a new home, life and career. We try to go back at least three times a year. We travel around the world a lot—mostly for business—and Cartagena is the only place where I can truly disconnect and reboot.

Every time I go back, I see the city through new eyes. I try to do something different that I've never done before. On a recent trip, for instance, Enrique and I got in the car and drove out to parts of the country we'd never explored. It's another reason to love Cartagena: You can venture two or three hours outside of the city, find mountains capped with snow and a gorgeous countryside that's completely undeveloped.



Among the centuries-old Spanish buildings in the city is the Hotel Charleston, with its charming courtyard



I grew up in a residential district of Cartagena, but my favourite place to stay—where I'd recommend that any visitor stay—is within the walls of the old town. This historic core is designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's absolutely charming and the streets are filled with pretty colonial homes, many of which have been converted to chic B & B and boutique hotels. If you like good food, you won't be disappointed. Among my favourite places is La Vitrola, a Latin American lounge where you can listen to Cuban music and catch up with friends over dinner. Vera is the best Italian restaurant in the city. And, if you're interested in exploring an up-and-coming art scene and some of the hippest restaurants and bars, go to the Getsemaní neighbourhood.

My favourite pastime, however, is to wander through the old town and watch the artisans at work. Every morning, I set out on foot from my hotel (I always stay at the Hotel Santa Clara, Sofitel) to see what they're making and how they're making it. You may pass a lady crafting a necklace or a fellow working on a chair. They use centuries-old techniques to create their pieces by hand, but they're always putting a slightly new spin on things. I've been at runway shows in New York and Paris and spotted pieces—embroidery on a blouse, or a certain style of bag or hat—that clearly were inspired by Colombian artisans. I too draw all of my inspiration from this city, its people, culture, food and music. It's part of who I am and part of everything I do.

THE BEST OF CARTAGENA NOW

BY Mercedes Sanati



GUESTHOUSE

With 10 stylish guest rooms, two swimming pools, and interiors that blend antique and modern furniture, colourful textiles and one-of-a-kind artwork, Casa Lola is an artfully designed bolt-hole in Getsemani. It's housed in a pair of buildings that date back to the 17th century, yet it's a stone's throw from the hippest salsa clubs and tapas bars in town.

Casa Lola
casalola.com.co



BOUTIQUE HOTEL

Soaring wood-beam ceilings, arched windows and flower-filled terraces make Casa San Agustin one of the most striking luxury boutique hotels in the city. Rooms boast modern four-poster beds, iron chandeliers, and in the largest suites, guests can cool off in private plunge pools. The hotel's restaurant, Alma, specializes in coastal Colombian cuisine—think lobster empanadas and octopus ceviche.

Casa San Agustin
hotelcasasanagustin.com



RESTAURANT

Bogota-born chef Alejandro Ramirez trained under Daniel Boulud and worked in London, New York and Tokyo before returning to his home country to open Maria. Fanciful tiger murals, pineapple-shaped chandeliers and an inventive menu (oxtail tacos; grilled sea bass with bacon and edamame; and costeño cheese wontons). Ramirez's partner in the enterprise is chef Juan Felipe Camacho, who runs the famously buzzy bistro Donjuán next door.

Maria
mariacartagena.com



LIFESTYLE STORE

St. Dom, dubbed “the Colette of Cartagena,” is noted for its collection of contemporary fashion, housewares and jewellery made by achingly chic Colombian artists and designers. Meticulously curated, with pops of colour on its white-washed brick walls, the boutique is owned by a husband-and-wife duo with an eye for style. They met while working for Ralph Lauren in New York.

St. Dom
Calle Santo Domingo 33-70

PHOTOGRAPH: LA PALETTERIA BY MELISSA CUENTAS; HIDEAWAY BY ISTOCK



ICE CREAM SHOP

Everyone needs a go-to place to cool down, especially given Cartagena's constant heat. La Paletteria (as its name suggests) focuses exclusively on the *paleta*, a Latin American iced pop made of fresh fruit. Here, a glass case contains every colour of ice pop in the rainbow, in flavours like coconut, raspberry, blueberry and pistachio.

La Paletteria
lapaletteria.co



HANGOUT

Fruity mojitos and sunset views are the mainstays at Malagana, a laid-back watering hole and snack bar in the heart of Getsemani, Cartagena's coolest new neighbourhood. The three-storey spot is run by sisters Diana and Maria Carolina Herrera Ordosgoitia. You'll want to camp out on their mosaic-tiled rooftop.

Malagana Café & Bar
45, Carrera 10 # 31



HIDEAWAY

An hour from Cartagena by boat, the azure shores of the Rosario Islands are an idyllic retreat. This archipelago is favoured by day trippers who want to squeeze some beachcombing, scuba diving and a freshly caught seafood lunch into their Cartagenian holiday. You can also stay the night at a beachside hotel (our favourite is the Hotel San Pedro de Majagua) and boat back to the city in the morning.

Rosario Islands
rosarioislands.com



DINING ROOM

The main reason to go to La Vitrola—a jazz club with an old Havana vibe, live six-piece bands, and ancient ceiling fans—is the people-watching. This place is a legend, a gossipy hub for tourists, regulars and Colombia's celebs, journalists and politicians. There's a strict dress code and reservations are a must. Everything gets sweaty and unwound as the dancefloor fills up in the wee hours.

La Vitrola
Calle Baloco 33-201