



Indian ceremonial fabrics lead the way to the apartment building, which dates from the 17th century and was once a workman's cottage, built for the staff of the village's castle. The surfboards of Deborah's two teenage boys, Gwyddien and Fabian, who often travel with her to surf in Bali and California.

TALES OF



A NOMAD

Colours and cultures collide in the Italian home and shop of textile collector, traveller and stylist Deborah Nolan.

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STYLING FRANCESCA DAVOLI

"Pull aside a beautiful African textile hanging in my shop and you're in my kitchen," smiles Deborah Nolan, who has established her life, shop, and a holiday-let apartment in the small village of Marittima in south-eastern Italy. Knocking through the two rooms in your home to create a fabric, fashion and accessories shop doesn't exactly sound conventional, but then again, very little in Deborah's life is. "I've always been a bit of a wanderer and collector of things," she admits.

Deborah needed a space to display her amazing textiles, fabrics, fashion and accessories that she has collected from all over the world, and thought the front bedrooms of her home in the "heel" of Italy seemed as good a place as any. "Named Tulsi Shop, it's down a little side street with no signage or anything, so I did think that no one would ever find us!" she laughs. "But I think the Italians found it interesting to have some strange woman with a shop in her house, and we've grown from here."

Born in London to two Irish parents (her father is from Offaly and her mother is from Belfast), Deborah's accent is mostly London, until she hardens her "r" to say Ireland. She still feels the pull of the country that's home to many friends and family. "We spent many summers in Ireland, visiting family and I try to get back at least once a year."

After living her late teens and early 20s in Dublin, styling brought her to a career in California and her love affair with bright, beautiful and handmade textiles began. "While I lived in America, I travelled a lot to Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, but it was much more

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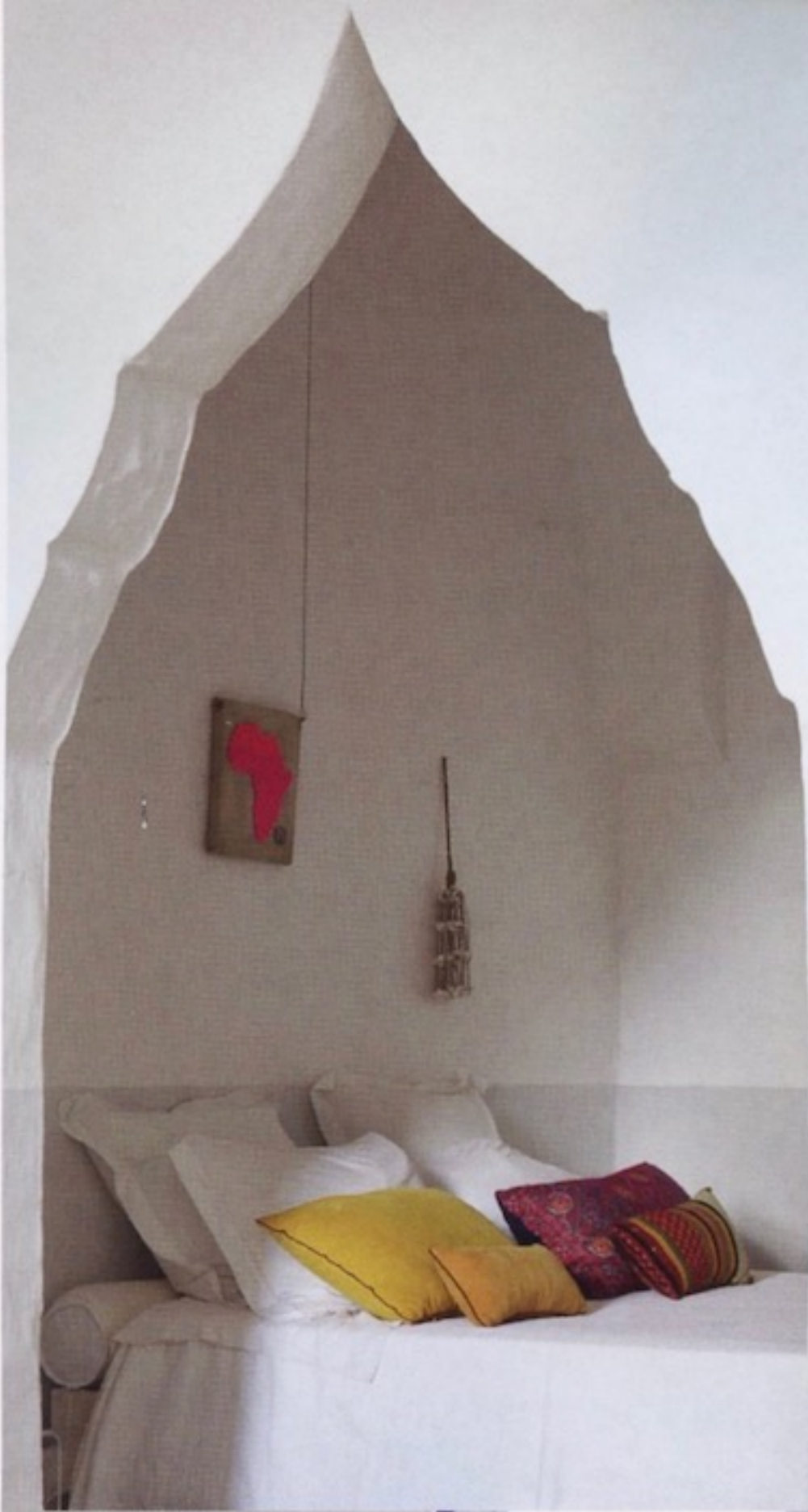
rural back then. We're talking nearly 30 years ago now, and I just began picking up things I couldn't leave behind."

A decade later, her travels took her to India where she admits falling completely in love with the country and its indigenous textiles. "My first son, Gwyddien, was born in India, in a community called Auroville. From there, we travelled around Thailand and Indonesia, until, when he was about four, I decided it was time for him to have a real life and proper, consistent schooling."

She decided on Puglia, the most eastern tip of Italy, where few tourists venture. "I came here about 10 years ago and there weren't many non-locals and we couldn't get a direct flight, we had

LEFT Deborah opened a second Tulsi Shop in Gallipoli four years ago and recently opened a small store in one of Puglia's finest five-star hotels, Masseria Torre Cocco. **OPPOSITE** The Moorish arch that separates the bedroom from the living space in the apartment.







to fly into Rome,” she recalls. “But Marittima attracts lots of artists and quirky people, from the film business in Rome and fashion business in Milan, so I decided to stay and raise both my boys here.”

They settled in a 1920s house in the village, but suitable work was hard to find and, after a successful run of trunk shows, Deborah decided to open her own shop, and bought a small apartment in town to rent out. “I just thought, okay I’m going to knock a wall down and start a shop.”

Populating the spaces with pieces she had brought over from India, including some 1920s furniture picked up in the south of the country, every corner has its own distinctive personality. In the shop, Art Deco glass cabinets from India protect her fabrics, while the kitchen is a mix of bright and busy Mexican textiles and old Italian items she has picked up since she arrived, like the big oak country table. All eyes here rise to the magnificent, arching, star-shaped ceiling. Known as a *stella* (Italian for star), it’s typical of 1920s Italian architecture and is mirrored by the original celestial-patterned floor tiles.

The nearby apartment too is enlivened by Deborah’s selection of fabrics and almost doubles as a show space for her exquisite collection. Originally a 17th-century workman’s cottage for the staff of the village’s Castello Spinola-Caracciolo (a 13th-century castle that contains living quarters and shelter for animals), it’s been transformed into a rough-walled apartment that captures the region’s architectural history.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The apartment is simply decorated in a selection of Deborah’s textiles and trinkets. A 1920s Indian cabinet stores a selection of fabrics. The stone walls of the apartment were left rough and whitewashed, as they would have been originally. A small window overlooks the village of Marittima.





The entrance is marked by a weather-worn wooden door, and the series of outdoor stairs and balconies are layered with Indian ceremonial fabrics that contrast with the big blue skies above and sea beyond. "It's a funny little whitewashed apartment, built from beautiful light-coloured stone from nearby Lecce," describes Deborah. "It's wonderfully higgledy-piggledy, the walls are uneven and the ceilings are curved."

Like the rest of the village, the space is quite Moorish, evidenced in the arch that hides the master bed. Taking inspiration from both south-eastern Italy's close architectural ties with Northern Africa and Puglia's Greek influences, Deborah left the walls in a simple whitewash that enhances the bright colours of the ancient nomadic fabrics that decorate the beds and the floors. "What I like about the apartment, and much of this region of Italy, is that it's not pristine like, say, Tuscany. It's crumbling down a bit, but rather quite charming."

Although firmly settled in this sleepy Italian town, Deborah still makes time to travel during the winter months when Marittima "becomes a tumbleweed". Between trunk shows in the US, fabric-buying expeditions to South America, Africa, and Asia, she also finds time to visit friends and family in London and Ireland.

It seems that, like the magnificent textiles that she is drawn to, Deborah has woven together a collection of cultures, communities and people into an extraordinarily vibrant life. tulsishop.com

OPPOSITE In Deborah's kitchen the original star ceiling steals the show, while her self-described "shabby chic" benches and tables blend beautifully with her bright fabrics. **ABOVE** A collection of ceramics and mementos occupy a corner. **LEFT** Through the blue doors (usually left open and covered only by a hanging curtain) is the Tulsi Shop.



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LEFT The star-patterned tiles were there when the family
moved in. **BELOW** A selection of Tulsi Shop's fashion items.

