



'CURATE' CONVERSATIONS ALI HEATH X SOAUD LARUSI

TEXTILES

My third chat is with inspirational rug & textile specialist Souad Larusi - founder of Larusi. Souad has inspired me for years & I feel very lucky to have enjoyed meaningful conversations with her about work, life & all things creative. She is from a considered & increasingly rare stable of business owners - who remain true to their original passion, following her heart to source only authentic pieces, with an in-depth insight into the makers & tribes behind the creation of the rugs, that she has become so well known for. A pioneering buyer within the field of Beni Ourain & original tribal rugs, Souad is highly regarded as THE expert when it comes to sourcing unique, high quality, ethically produced finds. No surprise that for so many leading industry names, Souad is considered their only go to contact. Despite her wealth of knowledge & experience, her style is charmingly humble & self-effacing - which only makes you love her more. TEXTILES is an Element that resonates at the heart of Souad's world, & it is an absolute pleasure to spark a conversation with her about the curation of her world.

BACKGROUND

Developing & writing CURATE has been such an enjoyable experience for me. Working with Australian stylist Lynda Gardener & photographer Marnie Hawson, the book portrays ten real monochromatic style homes, & I hope encourages readers to think big & create individual spaces, that are unique & personal to them & their story. CURATE also discusses 8 Elements that help to make a home (palette, nature, textiles, lighting, old & new, storage, collections & art. In this CURATE CONVERSATIONS series, 8 creatives are asked 20 questions, around one Element, & share their thoughts on their homes & businesses. I hope you enjoy!



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Who? Souad Larusi

Business? Rug + Textile Specialist,
Retailer

Home? A Victorian house on a journey.
I know some of the previous owners who
have lived here before us - it instills a
respect for what's there already, an
established foundation to add to.

**What three words best describe your
style?** Authentic, informal & meaningful .

Words to live by? We have neglected the
gift of comprehending things through our
senses. (Rudolf Arnheim)

**What does the notion of 'Curate' mean
to you at home?** Our house is going
through another transformation at the
moment - refreshing and transforming
several interrelated spaces, one at a time.
Never everything in one go.

For me curating a home does require
an over-arching idea about colour
texture & mood, to ensure the whole of
the house does not feel unbalanced.

A Victorian house is a bit like the
Firth of Forth bridge, once you
complete the top...

I am very particular about what goes
together & what the right items are to
go into a room. I am always prepared
to wait until the right thing comes
along.

Recently I got hold of of an original
triple wall lamp by Serge Mouille,
which will be perfect for the study.

For the living room I am having a
bespoke mid-century style sofa made
to the right size to suit our space.



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1. You have become synonymous as the go to source for high quality, authentic Beni Ourain & tribal wool rugs. What initially triggered your passion for these beautiful finds? In 2000, I decided to leave my cherished human rights job at Amnesty International (working on the Middle East & North Africa) to spend more time with our son. We had just moved from a flat to our first house, & simply could not find the carpet we wanted for the living room. My interest in tribal art, which I share with my architect husband, led me to source authentic rugs in my native Morocco to furnish our new house. When visiting friends & neighbours asked me to find them similar rugs, a business idea was born, organically. The link of the rugs, made by the Beni Ouarain tribe, to early twentieth Century architecture & interiors made me realise these weavings could be part of a nascent interest in crafted furnishings, in the early noughties.

2. You grew up in Morocco – did you always have an appreciation of these specialist weavings? I took them for granted when growing up. My mother, a master embroiderer, making ceremonial clothes, kaftans & golden thread wedding belts, would take me with her to the Fes Medina, to select thread & yarn.

The specialist shops would display hundreds of bobbins of colourful yarn, without any colour references or markings, & suhe would just choose on sight & experience.

I must have inherited that skill from her, differentiating between various yarn qualities, textures ...



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3. Despite having a very modern, contemporary aesthetic, the Beni Ourain rug designs have actually been perfected over many generations. When did this style of rug begin? The patterns & style of tribal rugs, such as those of the Beni Ourarain, go back millennia & are passed on from weaver to weaver (only women weave). There's much improvisation, many rugs are characterised by non-symmetrical patterns, that are free flowing & not bound - studded with symbols & bearing markings referring to the earth's elements, animals, fertility...

4. You were the first serious dealer to bring this style of rug to the UK & many leading designs names have remained loyal to you for many years. What sets you apart as the go to source? The love for these rugs & textiles always finds the likeminded.

I only buy what I like & deem to be good enough to sell. The care I take in selecting original handwoven pieces, their careful restoration & cleaning. Amongst my loyal clients, there are many designers, artists, fashion designers, textile professionals ...who appreciate the finer differences in quality. Some are trend setters in their field. So it's always a pleasure when they visit & I see that they spot the smaller details that might have made me select a rug or a textile in the first place. From the start I wanted to create a personal shopping experience & take the time to understand the clients needs & find the right piece for their interior - to make it an enjoyable buying experience. I was very chuffed when Tom Ford visited, bought rugs & commissioned me to produce some bespoke pieces for his Santa Fe home.

5. Customers come to you to authenticate the provenance of rugs & to source specific designs. How have you built up your knowledge of the specific nuances of each design style?

Twenty years of sourcing rugs & discussions with women weavers in Morocco has taught me a lot. A lot of travel at the beginning, trial & error & attention to detail.

6. These vintage rugs are produced by generations of families & come with a very humble provenance. How important is it to you to protect these handmade skills & to teach customers about the authentic, organic processes that go into their make-up? These skills are under constant threat from the forces of contemporary life & work patterns. There are fewer authentically woven rugs every year. In the old days, in the Beni Ouarain area for example, weavers used to collect the best wool over a couple of years to be able to make a rug with silky texture for themselves. Nowadays, the process has been speeded up, & the quality of the wool is not the same, it's often compromised.

7. There are lots of cheaper, non-handmade rugs hitting the retail scene nowadays. What things should customers be aware of with these cheaper alternatives? How sustainable are these new breed rugs? Most production from Morocco comes from 'co-operatives' & commercial workshops now & is profit driven. Beni Ouarain style rugs are now produced by non Beni Ouarain weavers who rely on copying the patterns, rather than the quality, the knotting techniques, details ...etc. I see the 'sustainable' label used very loosely nowadays when applied to rugs at least. As an example, weaving families have been washing their rugs in rivers using natural soap only. Nowadays, I see examples of rug washing in rivers on an industrial level where chemicals are used, which pollute not only the rivers but affect the vegetation, animals, crops etc.

8. How important are textiles to you at home? What mood do textiles create in your home? Textiles & rugs are part of the personal layer of furnishings that

make a home your home & are a large part of the mood of the space. The colour & texture, the pattern needed to match other design decisions, but a room without textiles can feel bare & cold.

9. Beni Ouarain rugs work well in both monochrome & more colourful interiors – for customers making an appointment to visit your showroom, how do you suggest they make the most from their visit? Come prepared, don't guess the size of that room & the rugs you think will fit. Measure before, bring any curtain fabric or floor samples that you are considering. Or when your space is already furnished, take some pictures to show shape, size, colours, textures & the light source in the room. Visit our website for inspiration & a selection of current stock.

10. What other style of rugs do you also sell? I have Moroccan & Turkish kilims, Mauritanian Tuareg mats & Berber Boucherouite rag rugs, made of recycled yarns & a great selection of Zindekh pieces (made from recycled yarn with a plastic sack backing), which are great to frame & hang on the wall.

11. How important is layering to you – how would you encourage others to layer rugs & textiles within their own homes? Tribal rugs are unique one-off pieces & you have to work with the sizes, textures & colours of a piece as it is. Layering can be a great way to resolve some design conundrums. Layer textures to create a sense of contrast: mix patterns but ensure they have a unifying element to keep the interior scheme coherent. Contrasting textures, colours & surfaces add interest in a visual & tactile sense.

12. Do you like to mix old & new textiles? Absolutely. Mixing vintage & new adds interest & individuality. Vintage textiles add a soul to a space – they have a story to tell reflecting their provenance & the hard work that goes into making them. They can provide texture & great contrast to sleek minimal interiors.



DAS KRANZBACH WELLNESS HOTEL, BY ILSE CRAWFORD. PHOTOGRAPHY: MARTYN THOMPSON.

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13. Do you think the use of rugs helps to create zones with a living area? Rugs are great to define seating &/or circulation areas. The size & proportion of the rug is an important consideration to get right. Great example at Das Kranzbach wellness hotel, in Bavaria (Germany) by Ilse Crawford.

14. You also sell a variety of other authentic textiles – what makes you tick when sourcing? First & foremost their tactility. A vintage textile can be completely plain but its handmade texture makes it interesting. Irregularities in the weave sometimes have elements of surprise. We have vintage textiles from Morocco, Turkey, Africa, Eastern Europe ...their clever use can add a pop of contrast, or work as a backdrop. Playing with their colour, pattern & scale, they can be applied to various elements in a home, from wallhangings, headboards, throws, curtains, upholstery & cushions.

15. The earthy palette of your beautiful new linen bedding has become legendary in interior design circles – how are the colours chosen by you? Are they mixed by hand & made to order? I started making crumpled informal bed linens 10 years ago, when it was still a novelty. The colours I created then – one off-white & three moody greys, informed various shades of earthy colours to expand the collection. I aim to create in-between shades that have depth, using thread dyed fabrics (which takes longer to make), playing with the colours for hours before I decide on one, or a combination. The fabric is then woven bespoke based on our specifications & the bedlinen made by our Masters of Linen certified producer, in Lithuania. I do not do seasons, as I believe that many of the colours are great for all seasons, depending on one's mood. I aim to create shades that feel universal & long lasting. Colour trends do not excite me. It's a slow process & I launch new products & collections when they are ready, often in small batches or limited quantities, not to hit a season.

16. Where do you seek inspiration?

I think it just happens when you are not looking for it. But it can be anywhere: a postcard, an exhibition, nature, an old textile fragment ...etc

17. What are you planning for home & your showroom?

New table linen, accessories & possibly a new showroom in 2022. Watch this space.

18. Are you planning any new textile exhibitions for 2021?

Yes a textile exhibition is in the pipeline for 2022.

19. Are there any new specialist textile makers are currently on your design radar?

Not so much new textile specialists, but rather people that I highly admire the work of:

- Catarina Riccabona: textile artist & weaver for her exquisite hand weavings, drawing inspiration from traditional textiles. (www.catarinariccabona.com)

- Martyn Thompson: I love MTS jacquard fabrics. His large scale patterns add a painterly aesthetic to interiors imbuing it with a distinctive artistic style. Great for adding drama in a room. We are lucky to be representing MTS in the UK. (www.martynthompsonstudio.com)

- Lucy Bathurst of Nest Design makes fabulous bespoke textile creations using a mix of new & vintage textiles (www.nestdesign.co.uk)



20. SOUAD'S TIPS FOR SELECTING TEXTILES

Choose something with personality
that has meaning to YOU.

Wall hangings can be framed (such as Zindekhs),
or discreetly fixed to the wall with concealed
fittings. Painterly rugs look great on walls.

Make selecting the textiles an integral part of
your interior, at the initial stage of planning a
scheme, not as an after thought.

Use textiles to help set the
mood in different rooms.

Go for tactility, not just pattern.



*Interview with Souad Larusi
live on my journal -
www.aliheath.co.uk
Huge thanks Souad.
Ali x*

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