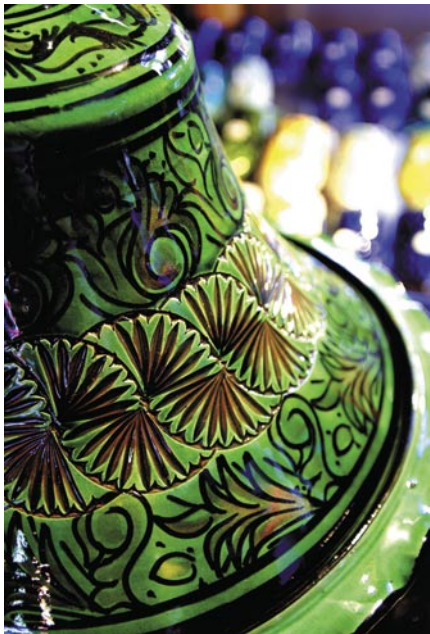




THINK MOROCCO



WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMIE DURRANT

*'Surely only a king would
be blessed with such perfectly
deceitful, golden trinkets'*

The subalpine township of Myrtleford on Victoria's Great Alpine Road is, at times, a bustling little gem of a town...

Sitting in the shadows of the beautifully monolithic granite cliff faces of Mt Buffalo, Myrtleford as a location attracts all walks of life: Travellers, skiers, foodies, young families and, not surprisingly, 'out there and going for it' business operators.

Take for example Red Ramia Trading, slap bang in the middle of town: Passers by cannot possibly miss the bizarre and outright attention-getting 'little slice of China's Great Wall', forming a not-so-subtle grand entrance to this thriving retail metropolis.

'It's our Great Wall - the Great Wall of Myrtleford,' happily states business owner Red Ramia - or just 'Red,' as friends

call him.

'If you're driving past and you see the wall, your first instinct is to take a peek to discover what's behind the wall. People stop and have a look - it's our best form of advertising.'

If the wall is anything to go by, then the hidden treasures within are no doubt the talk of the town. Entering the shop via the near-ancient elm wooded gates, one feels empowered and excited. A vast collection of outdoor pottery, fountains and antiques surround - a sea of historic curios greet you and draw you closer.

Having purchased the property around seven years ago, Red and his family have transformed the business into one of Australia's most unusual and explorative shopping experiences.

Around half of the stock is made up of Chinese antiques, including fine horsehair and bone paintbrushes, handmade doors, brightly coloured and extravagantly decorated furniture, silk textiles, swords, sculptures... the list goes on. But it's the Moroccan colour that now demands the attention.

Upon entering the first of many rooms, or display areas, an addictive assortment of Moroccan pottery blasts out with even brighter colours. It's hard to resist a purchase, as the mind instantly starts a greedy, yet enjoyable, snatch 'n' grab.

'Our shipment from Morocco arrived only two months





ago. We've already sold two-thirds of the pottery; it's going very well,' says Red.

'It's only been in the last two years that we've been importing. I'm travelling every three months to China, and now twice a year to Morocco. I've always been involved in antiques: In Geelong I sold Japanese antiques that I bought from other importers. Now that we've decided to do our own (importing), the business has grown enormously.'

Thinking Moroccan has become a bit of an addiction for Westerners in recent years. For Europeans, Morocco presents one of the most exotic short-haul destinations, and is now visited by more than four million tourists each year.

Although this Northern African kingdom presents an extremely long-haul destination for us Aussies, the colours and designs of Morocco are just as popular down under, and its influences are popping up all over the place.

One such example is the romantic and colourful atmosphere carefully created at Milawa's Hotel Lindenwarrah. Built in a similar style to a traditional Moroccan riad and magically lined with brightly coloured tiles, Lindenwarrah's central courtyard is softly lit with lanterns and provides a relaxing spot to enjoy a meal or glass of wine while overlooking the vineyard and nearby fountain.

Lindenwarrah also features quite a few other divine 'kingdom of colour' touches, such as hand painted Berber doors and a painstakingly hand riveted and painted Marrakesh chest – a real eye catcher – sitting peacefully at the entrance to the rather stately lounge.

Red Ramia Trading and Lindenwarrah could well serve as an inspiring architectural holiday/research trip – stay in one, shop in the other.

Red Ramia has imported many building materials such as hand-forged Moroccan wrought iron mirror frames, window frames, window panels and security panels, all once again painstakingly hand welded.

'If you want to incorporate some of the antique gates and windows into your home, you can come here with your architect. He or she can look at it and design your home or extension around it – there's a lot of good architectural stuff here,' says Red.

'Most of the Chinese gates range from about 150 to 200 years old and the Moroccan doors about the same. The gates and doors are made from elm and cypress pine mostly and heavy ironwork, all hand forged. The doors are all original and have been cleaned and polished, ready to fit into your new home.'

It's a surprising sight to see, a huge hand painted Berber door, sitting in country Victoria – ready for the taking.

In the calm of the alpine valley, admiring the painted colour and detail in the door, it is soon assured to self that such

Opening page: *Essentials* 'supermodel' Tatum, accessories by Furnwood Gallery, Wangaratta. **Above:** Traditional tagine at Wombat Hills Country Cottages, Hotel Lindenwarrah (inset).

Previous page: Imported Moroccan pottery, zelig tables and more – Red Ramia Trading, Myrtleford, Victoria.

passionate works of art must only be reserved for the likes of royalty. Surely only a king would be blessed with such perfectly deceitful, golden trinkets.

With the gift of a purchase in the air, one's imagination can quickly take hold: The peasants will now prepare a feast as you cast an eye toward the classical pottery – hundreds of cooking tagines imported from the coast at Safi. There are many in an array of colours – lustrous blues and spritely greens, some even the colour of preserved lemons...

In-house chef and owner of Mansfield's Wombat Hills Country Cottages, Helen Hookey, cooks with preserved lemons all the time.

'The preserved lemons are a tradition – they've become symbolic of Moroccan and other Middle Eastern food,' explains Helen. 'Basically you scrub them and then cut them nearly all into quarters, not quite all the way through, and then pack them with salt. Then you cover them with lemon juice and you just keep turning them every day for about three weeks. They'll last about three to six months, and they taste amazing.'

A classic Moroccan tagine is a bit like a stew, however it is given the name tagine as it's cooked over a low flame in a glazed terracotta vessel of the same name. For a sample of the result, check out the accompanying pictures – thank you Helen!

As with Helen's food, colour is now a permanent fixture at Red Ramia. Moroccan mosaic and zelig tables are everywhere, as are the most dashing selection of floor, wall – or anything, for that matter – tiles.

A kingdom of colour, flavour and style awaits – I bid you a safe journey.

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Wombat Hills Cottages, Mansfield/Tolmie, Victoria

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Lindenwarrah Country Hotel, Milawa, Victoria

Tel: 03 5720 5777 Web: www.lindenwarrah.com.au

Furnwood Gallery, Wangaratta, Victoria

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