

FARE



LISBON

Lisbon's steep, sun-drenched hills are home to crumbling tiled facades, pastel hues, and landscaped parks. In a city awash with new opportunities, Lisboetas still share in their collective memory of the city's past.



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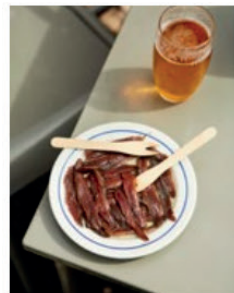
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Joana Astolfi takes a bit of Lisbon with her every time she steps out of her house. The artist and architect in her have yet to make peace with the new, featureless buildings that have been erected in the last few decades. Her heart belongs to an older, more charismatic Lisbon – one you can still grasp in the neighbourhoods she often visits. From old shops to cosmopolitan cafés, Joana leaves her mark wherever she passes through. Of all the different designs she has contributed to the city, her own space is among the most intriguing.

Words by Soraia Martins
Photography by Liz Seabrook



I meet her at home, a cosy haven of unlocked memories and visual miscellanea. It is quite easy to see her love of objects. She is a collector, after all. Joana spent about twelve years studying and working in other countries before she returned and settled down in Lisbon for good. Her hometown, however, is Cascais, a picturesque coastal fishing town, a short car or train ride from Lisbon – and, nowadays, the epitome of a resort refuge for locals and travellers alike.

Her father was an architect and an artist and had a studio in Cascais where Joana spent many hours drawing and gulping down everything that was going on. The family travelled a lot around the world, and from a young age, she could grasp his attention to detail, especially when it came to picking souvenirs to take back home. “Already then, my eyes were fine-tuning to his vision, which I then transformed into mine,” Joana tells me, her eyes wandering around the room while her mind searches deep into her memory.

Her mother owned an art gallery in Cascais for most of her life, which profoundly impacted Joana’s upbringing. Her home was quite the place to be. “There would be artists, parties, barbecues, bossa nova, people dancing. It was always very lively. A lot of visual information that was very enriching to me,” she recalls. She did not play with dolls – she recalls that she always looked for objects that had “some kind of truth to them,” like vintage wooden toys, and particularly loved them “when they were broken.” “I used to buy [objects] at flea markets with my dad, or at antique shops. There was always something I wanted, like an old instrument or something like that” Imperfection is a reality Joana is not willing to let go of, as it is what she believes in the most. She does not like white walls – or white pages, for that matter.

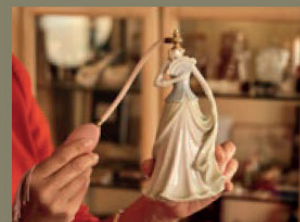
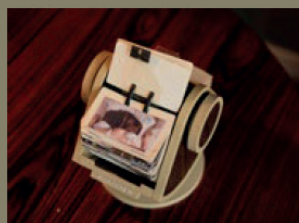
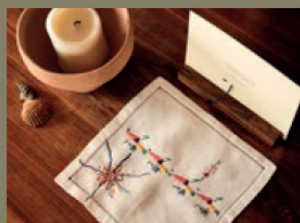
Looking around Joana’s house, I find myself delving into a special kind of world. Thrifted trinkets, glass cabinets, walls punctuated by

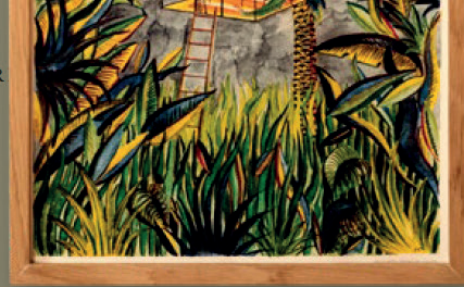
small-scale furniture items, tiny bottles, and vintage art. “I love to tell stories through objects. I love to wallow in the archives and do my research in person, chasing around memories and palpable moments that stay frozen in time through a certain something,” she tells me. Everything here has a purpose, a weight that only she can carry. One of the objects that stands out is a hand-sewn love letter Joana wrote to her daughter, Duna. Her beautiful words jumping off the delicate fabric tell me exactly what I need to know about their relationship, and, at the same time, it seems so rare and indecipherable to me. Duna – which translates as “dune,” a one-of-a-kind name for a little girl in Portugal, where children’s names must be chosen from an approved list – is the love of Joana’s life and is always very much present in her discourse. Every part of this home was created and assembled to tell their story together, such as the Duna-sized furniture next to the record player, or the wall installation made from hundreds of recycled colouring pencils (although there are a few things Duna is not allowed to touch, the large glass cabinet being one of them).

Inside, upon the shelves, myriad items also tell many stories of their own, and Joana knows each one by heart; where everything came from and the meaning it holds for her, from her mother’s wedding ring to a pair of red binoculars she found once at the Lisbon flea market. “I have this quirk: I love peeping into places and things. I have had these binoculars for years, and they really emulate my whole persona, this voyeur side. I like the colour, the size. And I actually use them; they work!” she says, riveted by her own discovery, as if looking at these objects again and again brings new feelings each time.

This is how Joana’s mind works, too – constantly looking at things from new angles.







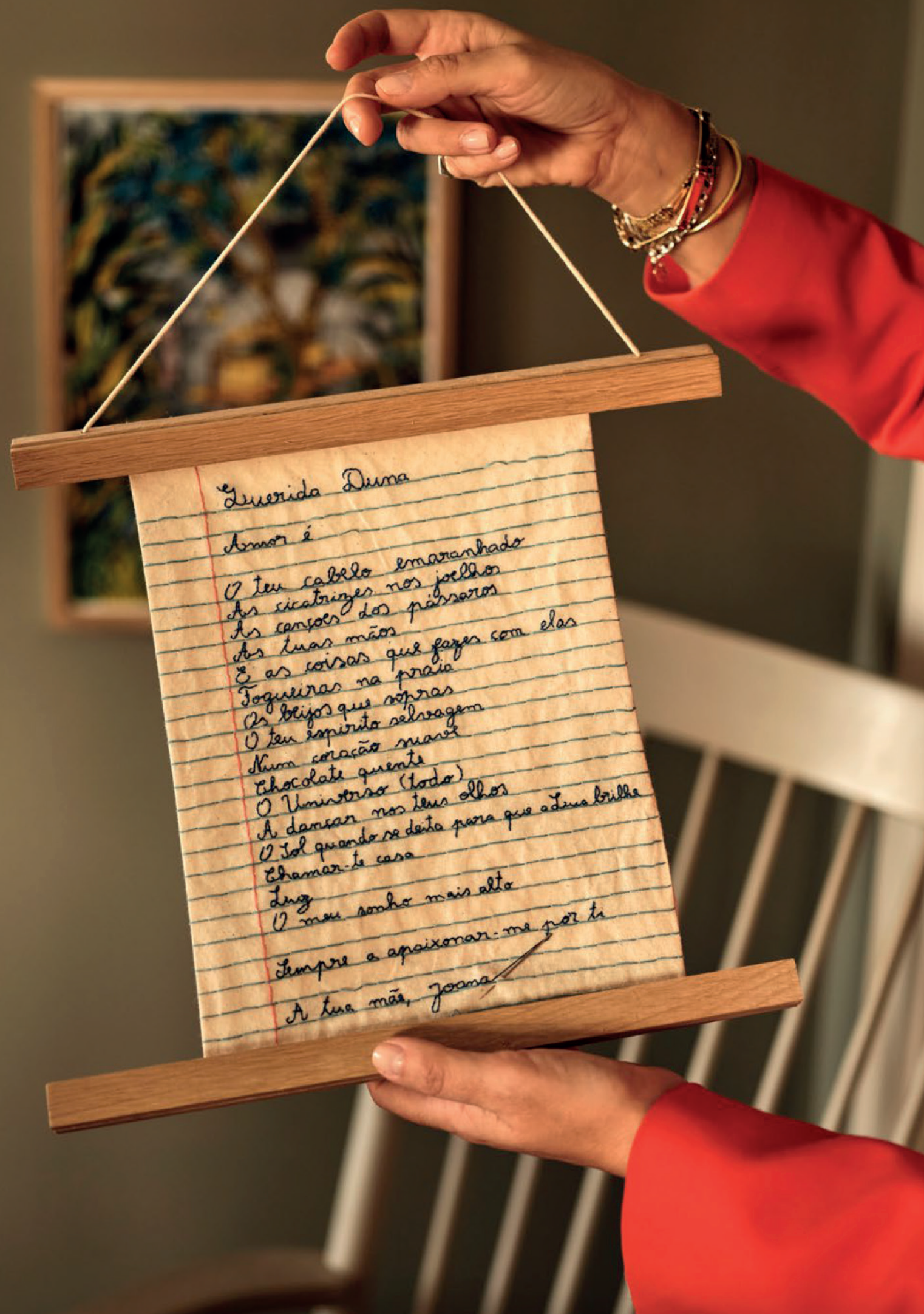
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Querida Duna

Amor é

O teu cabelo emaranhado
As cicatrizes nos joelhos
As canções dos pássaros
As tuas mãos
E as coisas que fazes com elas

Fogueiras na praia
Os beijos que sopras

O teu espírito selvagem
Num coração meu

Chocolate quente
O Universo (todo)

A dançar nos teus olhos
O sol quando se deita para que a terra brilhe

Chamar-te casa
Luz

O meu sonho mais alto

Sempre a apaixonar-me por ti

A tua mãe, Joana

As the head of Studio Astolfi, she and her small team tackle a lot of different projects and subject matter, from interior design to architecture, from retail window displays to creating “cabinets of curiosities,” wonder-rooms that gather collections of notable objects. “It’s what I love doing the most,” she admits. “If you just give me a month to go around town, peep into spaces, and look for objects, I will absolutely love it.” Even though many of the small shops where Joana used to go to source her favourite objects are now disappearing, Lisbon is still a deep well teeming with exciting places where she likes to wander in if she has “a specific challenge for an interior project or a particular shop window to assemble.” DEPOZITO is an example of such a place, and after a quick phone call to the owner, Catarina, Joana decides to pop in on our way to the studio.

Though recently opened, DEPOZITO is the lovechild of renowned A Vida Portuguesa, one of the most acclaimed shops in Lisbon for genuine Portuguese products, and Portugal Manual, a network of contemporary artisans showcasing what Portugal is all about. It is pretty hard to visit DEPOZITO without wanting to take everything home, and Joana knows that. This is the kind of place that gets her mind bustling with ideas and her eyes shining like they are watching fireworks. Scanning around the shop, I see countless items that indisputably belong in one of Joana’s projects or a corner of her home. Traditional ceramics, old wooden toys, wicker baskets, vintage posters, linen shirts and iconic hats, as well as all kinds of reinvented pieces made by contemporary artisans. It is all about history and innovation coming together, much like her own studio’s projects.

Studio Astolfi is situated in Bairro Alto, a stirring yet authentic neighbourhood Joana adores, and hopes will stay like this forever.

Like her house, the studio is an echo of her adoration for objects, as well as materials. “I’m always looking for different materials for my designs. I love seeing how they behave with each project,” she says. As we step inside the studio, it feels like entering yet another realm inside Joana’s mind. Comfortable and oozing creativity, the cosy space is reminiscent of her first-ever studio when she came back to Portugal to live – in Bairro Alto, no less. “It is almost like a home,” she mentions while stroking some wicker samples she has been studying for a new project. They are displayed as if to be exhibited to a broader crowd, as are bits of multi-coloured marble, hidden stashes of textile samples, and loose tiles placed next to the kitchen sink. The whole place is a treasure hunt.

One of Joana’s most iconic pieces hung upon a shelf for us to try. They’re called the iShells: headphones made of seashells that allow you to hear the sea. “This piece has a lot to do with my upbringing in Cascais, near Guincho beach – this beautiful, spread-out, Atlantic beach, where I used to pick up shells and try to listen to the sounds of the sea,” she muses. “This piece is a poetic manifesto to the digital versus the analogue, which has a lot to do with me and what I do.”

As we picked our way through the studio and its treasures, Joana brought out the biggest book-turned-notebook I’d ever seen, a comically massive tome that must have measured nearly half a metre wide. She had it custom made for a Lisbon Hermès display window, and it came back to the studio, along with many other objects. She brought out pens and encouraged us to leave something behind: a drawing, a poem, a memory. Not surprisingly, there were already a few drawings signed by Duna, of course, in countless shapes and colours – a tough act to follow.