



VINT

AGE

HOME

20th-century Design for  
Contemporary Living

Judith Miller

# VINTAGE HOME



## Berlin meets Brazil

In a fashionable area in East Berlin there is a little enclave of exotic Rio de Janeiro. The interior designer Hubert Zandberg has a passion for the furniture and traditions of Mid-Century Brazil. Historically many Brazilian designers had been trained in Europe and were influenced by the 'old country' styles. This began to change in the early 20th century and by the mid-20th century the work of **Joaquim Tenreiro**, **Sergio Rodrigues** and **José Zanine Caldas** had transformed Brazilian design. In this apartment the Brazilian pieces, with indigenous woods, combine effortlessly with Scandinavian brass lights, tubular steel Bauhaus chairs, a **Jean Prouvé** industrial bench and contemporary Italian tables. The designer believes that there should be a mix of styles, as to have all retro or vintage can become too self-conscious. There are also large photographs of the semi-desert South African Karoo by David Goldblatt that take Zandberg back to his rural South African roots. It is in the contrast that you achieve the dynamic.

A cocktail trolley was an absolutely essential accessory in any stylish Mid-Century apartment. This, however, is a rather fine example designed by the Brazilian **Sergio Rodrigues** (below). The mood is lightened by the kitsch paraphernalia, including a pineapple ice bucket.

The perfect mix of natural and industrial (right) – the Brazilian jacaranda-wood chair with rare colour combination Kuba fabric to the iconic **Jean Prouvé** steel and oak bench.



# NATURAL ORGANIC

Advances in technology and materials allowed designers to create organic shapes from plywood and tubular steel. These materials – which had previously been used to make rigid, geometric forms – produced softer shapes for furniture that combined comfort and function. The thinner, lighter tubular steel and strong plywood meant that tables and chairs were slimmer and pared down, but just as robust as their predecessors. Another breakthrough was that designers were able to make single-component furniture, such as a chair with a back and seat moulded from one sheet of wood. As well as being attractive, these objects were easy to mass produce, and affordable.

*opposite, clockwise from top left* Although **Charles and Ray Eames's** 1956 lounge chair with matching ottoman is a technically sophisticated piece of man-made engineering, it also has a substantial organic component: in its curved plywood, rosewood-veneered shell and its leather-covered upholstery. This gives it what Charles Eames wanted: 'the warm receptive look of a well-used first baseman's mitt' / Organic material – teak – is echoed in an organic form – a teardrop – in this two-tier Mid-Century Modern coffee table / A row of Charles and Ray Eames's classic DCWs (Dining Chairs Wood): conceived in 1945–46 and constructed from bent plywood, their comfortable seats and back were, in their softly undulating and rounded shape, inspired by the gentle curves of the humble potato crisp / In a New York loft, the rigidly geometric forms of a 20th-century daybed, inspired by Classical and Neo-classical prototypes, is counterbalanced by the more curvaceous, organic qualities of a simple wooden table and a **Poul Kjærholm**-esque chair.

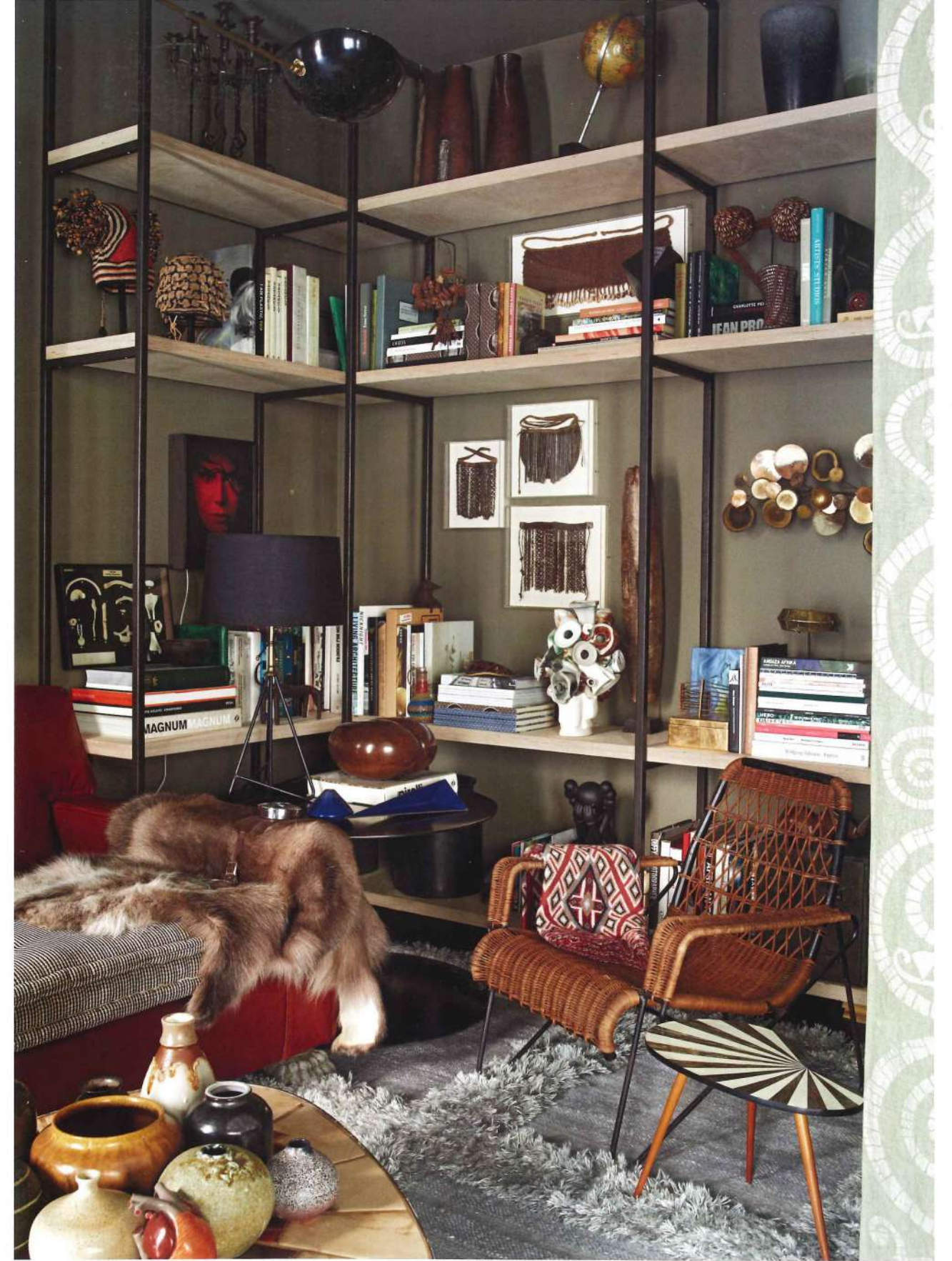
*right* The inherently warm tones of polished Brazilian hardwoods, woven grass panelling and vegetable-dyed woollen rugs balance the cooler white and off-white palette of the architectural shell in a bedroom in interior designer Hubert Zandberg's Berlin apartment.

## Sergio Rodrigues

Architect **Sergio Rodrigues** is considered to be one of the most important influences on modern design in Brazil. His company Oca Industry, which he started in Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro, in 1956, encouraged craft and furniture design in the country. But he left it after 12 years to focus on designing his own furniture.

Rodrigues used local woods such as eucalyptus, jacaranda, peroba and imbuia, combined with leather and rattan in his furniture. His designs mixed Classical details with traditional woodworking skills and contemporary shapes and scale. Their unique character was created by a combination of natural and sensual characteristics. He came to international prominence when he launched the Poltrona Molé (soft armchair or Sheriff chair). The low-slung, wood-framed chair has leather cushions supported by straps that flow over the arms. It had been designed four years earlier, but in 1961 it won first prize at an international furniture competition in Cantu, Italy, where it was celebrated for being distinctively Brazilian in attitude, scale and material. Early Molé chairs were made from jacaranda, but since the trees were over-harvested, the factory switched to using eucalyptus, pau marfim and ivorywood.

In all, Rodrigues designed more than 1,200 pieces of furniture. Other notable pieces include the Taja line, a collection of outdoor chairs and tables, and the Voltaire armchair. The Voltaire has a solid wood frame, but its voluptuous upholstered seat and backrest seem to envelop the sitter. The Chifruda or 'horned' chair has a sweeping wooden backrest that resembles a pair of antlers.



Cubism dominates this room (*opposite*). The structure of blocks is at the heart of Modernism. The sofa is Brazilian with African fabric that is Modernist-inspired, the brass table bought in Istanbul is Italian and the brass brandy glass-shaped light is Scandinavian.

In the library again (*above*) is a pleasing mix of styles, from the French Business Class metal and cane chair to the small plywood Spanish 1950s kidney-shaped table to the fascinating collections of African artefacts on the shelves, showing the influence of primitivism.



This chair is designed by the Brazilian **Joaquim Tenreiro**, a pioneer of modernist Brazilian furniture-making (*left*). He said a chair should be 'formally light ... a lightness which has nothing to do with weight itself, but with graciousness, and the functionality of spaces.'

In the mid-1950s **Charles and Ray Eames's** Lounge Chair (670) and Ottoman (671) revived the classic combination of armchair and matching footstool. This contemporary black leather-upholstered example combines an Eames-like ottoman with a Mid-Century Modern interpretation of the traditional 'wing-back' design (*below*).

In the corner of the bedroom an open armchair designed by **Rodrigues** is in front of a 1950s French desk (*opposite*). Zandberg says the ball light is very 'Berlin' and also like the moon in Africa. The photograph is by David Goldblatt of rural Africa, where Zandberg grew up.

