



MORO

THIS CONCEPT STORE WITH A RETAIL SPACE, RESTAURANT AND HOTEL SHOWS HOW TO
CREATE MORE REVENUE STREAMS BY TURNING YOUR SHOP INTO A DESTINATION.

There are stores that invite you to buy – and stores that invite you to stay. Moro, a concept store in Marrakech, fits the latter description. There's a bright and airy showroom selling cosmetics and fragrances made from regional ingredients – such as prickly-pear seed oil and rose water – along with a product line of clothing and goods created by local designers. Moro also has a pool, garden, open-air cafe and 16 guest rooms, including several reserved for artists-in-residence who have become friends of the owners. 'We're really proud of this project,' says Mohcyn Bouasfha, who is one of the co-founders. 'It's a place where everybody feels good.'

Lots of shop owners say this kind of thing, but chasing the feel-good factor is what motivated Mohcyn and his business partner Mouad Mohsine to pursue a dream in the first place. It all started with a farm in 2015, when Mouad acquired a 10-hectare patch of land in the countryside between Marrakech and Tassouta filled with century-old olive trees. Shortly afterwards, he asked Mohcyn to join the venture. It was never meant to be a straight-up business, he explains, but instead a place to breathe, where the two could get away from their stressful jobs. Mohcyn was an interior designer and architect, while Mouad was an engineer.

Before long, the two childhood friends started exploring the land's aromatic and medicinal plants, such as rosemary, lavender and more. The region is filled with women's co-operatives that produce highly coveted argan oil from local argan trees – it's the only place in the world where they grow naturally. Mohcyn and Mouad realized that, with a bit of branding and production, they could bottle up this unique ingredient for others to experience as well. And so skincare brand The Moroccan was born.

Initially, Mohcyn and Mouad moved to Dubai to launch the brand – it provided easy access to retailers and a customer base hungry for products containing Morocco's uniquely beneficial ingredients. It didn't take long

for The Moroccans to find success: within a few months it was stocked in 12 stores, including high-profile cosmetics shops such as Sephora. Still, the duo felt there was something missing. 'Marrakech is a city that has a big soul in comparison to Dubai,' says Mohcyn. 'It has a history. It has a magic that you cannot find in Dubai.'

The duo returned to Morocco and opened their first shop right next to fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent's colorful botanical garden, Jardin Majorelle, which offered generous foot traffic both from locals and international visitors. They grew their own product line and began stocking Moroccan brands. When a hotel first built in the cliffsides went up for sale around the corner, it felt like a natural evolution for the brand. Looking back, Mohcyn says: 'It wasn't twice as all, but it had huge potential.' There was plenty of work to be done – the interior was outdated and there was an uncovered garden in the center. But Mohcyn and Mouad turned the garden into the central part of the shop, covered by a natural water-resistant woven roof, and constructed the floor around three fruit-producing bitter-orange trees that now shelter a table of candles and a jewelry counter (it's also the space where Mohcyn's dog, a fluffy akita named Bono, decides to take a nap).

From here, the shop branches off into smaller showrooms. A spiral staircase leads to a mezzanine with dresses; a low-ceilinged room houses a rotating selection of local designers and leads out to the pool; and giant glass doors open to a quiet covered outdoor cafe serving local dishes with a modern twist, such as marinated chicken with caramelized onions and cauliflower rice.

They're continuing these expansions to include an outdoor space that will showcase hand-painted ceramics and more clothes. The space can also be used for dinners and events. For the interiors, they went

CONCEPT STORE



While they have worked with individual designers, Mohy and Moud plan to bring more local artisan groups into the fold. The idea is to bring co-operatives doing embroidery, sewing, knitting and all this to collaborate with us, says Mohy'n.

with a relatively natural and minimal base – such as circular shelves cut directly into the wall – plus more playful details such as a vintage writing desk.

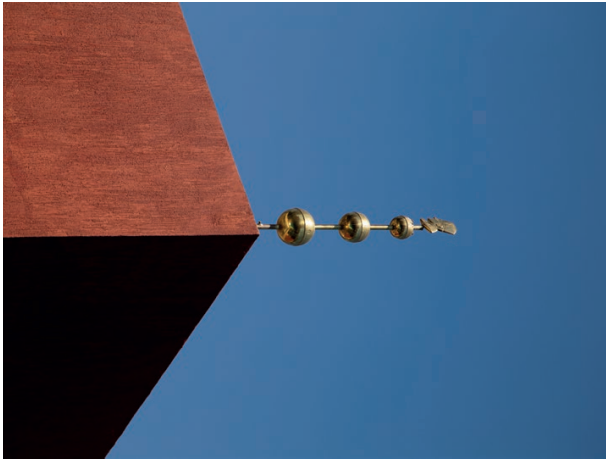
'We've always loved this "cabinet of curiosity" atmosphere, an apothecary and all of that type of universe,' says Mohy'n.

While they were open for only two weeks with a limited number of suites before Covid lockdown's began, they used the downtime to continue renovations and host creatives in residence – such as embroidery artist Aldha El Moudaden, whose designs are now stocked in the shop. Since then, they've played host to weaver Sana Benzaiter, yoga studio Koots Holistic Center and more. All the involved artists are other customers of the shop or have been connected through friends.

Despite the effort put into their physical shop, online retail is on the rise in Morocco. The country had an exceptionally long lockdown, which led to the adoption and trust of shopping online – something that has continued even as the country has reopened. Online retail transactions were up 48% in 2021 compared with 2020, according to the Interbank electronic banking center.

In order to draw footfall, companies that offer non-essential products need to give people a good reason to stop in and stay a while. While Mohy'n and Moud also offer online shopping, both for Moro and The Moroccans, they've seen that customers are still craving the tangible. 'People like the exchange, when you explain where

06 MORO, MARRAKECH





CONCEPT STORE

things come from,' Mohcyn says. 'It's a different experience. I think that people now crave this human contact.'

While it may seem like it's a long way from their original skincare line, Mohcyn says it's important to remember that products don't live on shelves – they're a part of customers' everyday lives. The Moroccan body lotions and soaps are stocked in the on-site saunas, giving visitors a chance to test the products in situ. The different elements of the store also allow the business owners to continue expanding and experimenting – Mohcyn describes Moro as a lifestyle and slow-fashion brand, and one that will shift along with their interests. It's a creative vision that people can buy into beyond the skincare products.

'That's why you feel that this place is alive,' Mohcyn says. 'People when they go and come back, always find new things.' This is very important to me.

He points out that there are a lot of different ways to grow a brand – early on, they had plenty of offers from investors to boost their skincare line – but if they had taken that early money, they wouldn't have been able to build a place that's true to what originally inspired them.

'We want it to grow organically, because we believe that when something comes quickly – I'm talking about success – it goes quickly,' he says. 'We really want to keep it for us because, in the end, we're keeping in mind the idea that we had in the beginning – a destination for escaping the everyday routine.'

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76

06 MORO, MARRAKECH



The Moro store carries products designed in-house, such as ceramics and clothing. 'The clothing is all limited edition,' says Mohcyn. 'When I do a design, I do a maximum of five pieces of each because I do it for fun, not only for business. Even if something doesn't sell, I don't mind it. I want to create more and always try new things.'

DIG DEEPER

Moro is many things – shop, eatery, accommodation... plus the pool and grounds provide the kind of space you'd happily spend the day wandering around. Maximizing the space available, beyond simply thinking of it as somewhere to place a store, was one of the most exciting challenges the founders took on when launching the business. On page 277, in the **Managing your money** section, we look at some things you can do with more bang for your buck.



77