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Muy salsa!



SANTA FE STYLE: A chair from the Salsa store in Larkspur has a simple, rustic look. **M photos/Travis Frost**

Mexican country styling is colorful, durable and popular

By Beth Ashley
LJ senior feature writer

ANYONE who has been to Mexico, or the American South, west, knows the allure of cool tiles, Indian rugs, and massive wood furniture that speaks of the past. Many people want that same look in their own homes. Edna Hayes and Bruce Noedlman, longtime Mill Valley residents, certainly did — and went to Mexico and Santa Fe to find the furniture they craved. Later, they found Salsa, a small retail outlet near the trestle in Larkspur, specializing in imports from Mexico. They liked it so

much they bought it. In the five years since then, they have quadrupled the store's business, expanded the space from 700 to 6,000 square feet, and

opened two more outlets — one in Berkeley and the latest on Broadway in the town of Sonoma where they now live. The stores all spe-

cialize in the same things — hand-made wood furniture, Navajo rugs and a range of Western trimmings.

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In your home

Here is how to add a touch of Mexican country style to your home:

- Coffee mortars, deep wooden bowls used for grinding beans by hand, can serve as cache pots or holders for magazines, umbrellas, gourds. Use pestles, the grinding tool, as door handles and towel bars.
- Making stools, carved from tree stumps, serve as plant stands or footstools.
- Prop hand-hewn stepladders against a wall. Sugar coolds present a similar decorative statement with their honeycomb of crates for making brown sugar carved into a simple section of a tree trunk.



LEATHER AND ROUGH WOOD: Here is a living room group from Salsa in Larkspur. The store owners have expanded to Berkeley and Sonoma.

Mexico

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The Larkspur store, at 14 E. Sir Francis Drake Blvd., is located in a small Western-style arcade on the road to Larkspur Landing in a turn-of-the-century wood building painted terra cotta and blue. Now called the Salsa Trading Co., the three high-ceilinged showrooms offer a wide selection of sturdy tables and hand-hewn chairs, some in stressed wood or rough finishes, all with the substantiated look of earth and age. Some chairs have rush seats. Some have limbs of hickory with the bark still on.

Some of the tables, like the cabinets, armoires and credenzas, are made from recycled red cedar. Oxidized chains and sofas are upholstered in denim or hand-worn leather.

Furniture is just part of the mix. On the walls are an array of Zapotec rugs and several large-size, all-wool imitation Navajo rugs made in the Ukraine. Chandeliers of wrought iron or deer antlers hang from the ceilings. A selection of Mexican pottery — some in rich colors, some glazed black — is displayed on tables. Here and there are Indian drums and artifacts, Mexican glassware, silver jewelry, bleached

buffalo skulls peering vacantly from the walls.

A huge annex to Salsa, called Rancho California, offers more formal furnishings with a Spanish heritage look. Offerings include hand-forged iron bed sets, huge mirrors, and dining tables with elegant finishes and handsome chairs. Many are reproductions of furnishings used by California's Mexican settlers.

"Many people want a lodge look," says Hayes. "We do a lot of houses at Lake Tahoe." The furnishings are also well-suited to the Mediterranean style of many Marin homes.

Hayes, formerly retail director for Jessica McClrack's fashion house, and husband Bruce Needleman, a costume dealer in fine jewelry, were looking for "really traditional, well-built, comfortable furniture" for their home when they found Salsa.

They were also looking for a more settled lifestyle, which is why they bought the business. "We wanted to see each other once in awhile," she says.

The decision was a good one, she says.

"Business keeps growing. The Sonoma store is just exploding.