

VERANDA

Merida Art Director Sylvie Johnson and Veranda's Joy Moyler Discuss the Uplifting Power of Artists

The pair talks Japanese material culture and life's greatest gift.





Joy Moyler is a New York-based designer with a degree in architecture and passion for fashion. She is also the host of High Tea with Joy on Instagram Live @joymoylerinteriors.

DAVID A. LAND

Joy Moyler: I remember when you took the helm in 2017. It felt like such lovely “Black girl magic” because it was so wonderful to see you in this role. And of course, I knew you’d worked with Peter Marino; what a perfectionist he is. Are you a perfectionist?
Sylvie Johnson: I am! And they will tell you this in Fall River, Massachusetts, where our factory is.

JM: Do you drive them crazy a little bit?

SJ: No, I’m just a hard worker, and if it *can* be better, why shouldn’t it be? When young people come to Merida, I say to them, “Look out to the stars as far as the galaxy can see. Strive for this; then you can live your dreams and be yourself.”

JM: Yes—be yourself, but be excellent at being yourself! Speaking of excellence, your designs are favored by many top designers around the world. Is there an artist, living or dead, with whom you wish you could collaborate?

SJ: I would have loved to have worked with Eileen Gray. Her talent, her spirit, and, as a woman, what she did for design. And I’d have tea with Rodin and talk about the way he thought about the face, the body, our muscles. As much as he focused on the physical body, it seems he was also thinking about the mind.



Sylvie Johnson with the graphic Sahara rug
COURTESY OF MARINO

JM: I can imagine some of your works infused with Auguste Rodin's work and Eileen Gray's beautiful 20th-century modernism. She is an inspiration to me as well.

SJ: For me, the true power of an artist is to be able to see the best and the most positive things in life. Artists have this capacity to reveal beauty even in the worst darkness.

JM: It's like what we are doing with the pandemic: in our current darkness, trying to find the light.

SJ: Exactly. All these things are happening around us right now, but hope is the most important thing, and hope is beauty. There is no hope without beauty. This can come from a grandmother's sewing project, writing a love letter to a friend...It's all art.



Merida's natural fiber yarns.

COURTESY OF MERIDA



Boboli rug, price upon request;
meridastudio.com

BRIAN WOODCOCK



Bogazi rug, price upon request;
meridastudio.com

BRIAN WOODCOCK



Carmine rug, price upon request;
meridastudio.com

BRIAN WOODCOCK



Piazzì rug, price upon request;
meridastudio.com

BRIAN WOODCOCK

JM: It's great to see beauty in so many everyday things. Do you have a favorite fragrance? **SJ:** My favorite scent is Chanel's Chance, but in my environment, I love whatever is in season. Garden roses or peonies in spring, chimney smoke in winter, anything that tells you what season you are in.

JM: What are some of your favorite items in your everyday environment?

SJ: That's like asking who your favorite child is! I have a little teapot from Japan from the 18th century. It's ceramic and poetic. You can imagine traveling with this in the desert.

JM: We share a love for Japanese culture and textiles. A friend recently gave me a 16th-century Obi that I treasure.

SJ: Yes! I have a spool of 16th-century copper silk thread that would have been used to make antique kimonos. I cherish it.

Inspiration from Art Director of Merida Sylvie Johnson



Vintage Japanese wooden spool, \$30, oldindustrialjapan.com for similar. [OLDINDUSTRIALJAPAN.COM](http://oldindustrialjapan.com)



Inspiration from Art Director of Merida Sylvie Johnson



Rodin's *The Thinker*. HERITAGEIMAGES



Inspiration from Art Director of Merida Sylvie Johnson



Chance eau de parfum, \$135; [chanel.com](https://www.chanel.com) CHANEL

Inspiration from Art Director of Merida Sylvie Johnson



Eileen Gray's lacquered six-panel screen, circa 1922-1925. COURTESY OF CHRISTIE'S



Inspiration from Art Director of Merida Sylvie
Johnson



Tuileries Garden in Paris...[JESU/GETTY IMAGES](#) [GETTY IMAGES](#)

Inspiration from Art Director of Merida Sylvie
Johnson



A pink peony. [OAVES AND STARR/GETTY IMAGES](#) [GETTY IMAGES](#)



JM: What are some luxuries you can't live without?

SJ: My freedom. Going to the Pont Neuf between meetings to think about Christo when he covered it. Visiting the Louvre's tableware collection when no one is there. I also enjoy going to the Rodin museum to see sculptures and the garden with my daughter, who is four and a half, but sometimes I go alone.

JM: What a lucky woman! Being able to step out into the world during the day, our minds open. What makes Paris, one of the most beautiful cities in the world, home for you?

SJ: Home for me is where art is. In Paris, I will visit a museum just to see one painting. It can belong to me. It can be my own for a moment.

***“my grandma said, ‘sylvie, sit up straight....manners are fundamental.’
” —sylvie johnson***

JM: What is your most treasured possession?

SJ: It's something my grandparents and my parents gave me: the knowledge that it's an honor to be open-minded and respectful of others. Everyone has equal skills, so I encourage people to strive for excellence, to be better than you are now.