

Casa Cubista

Hand crafted home goods.

Writer **Doug Wallace**



It was just meant to be a year's sabbatical in Portugal—a reboot, time for designers David Pimentel and Arren Williams to think about the next stage of their lives: where they wanted to live, what they wanted to do.

Instead, moving to the eastern Algarve, on Portugal's sunny southern coast, turned out to be a creative turning point. That was in 2015. Since then, splitting their time between Toronto and Olhão, a fishing hub near the city of Faro, the husband-and-husband

team have created Casa Cubista, a contemporary collection of Portuguese-made homewares officially founded in 2016. Pimentel and Williams design a mix of tableware, linens, rugs, wall hangings, and home furnishings, injecting their sense of style into traditional crafts and pegging the results as “handmade modern”. They then work with potters, weavers, basketmakers, and wood carvers—family-run businesses trying to preserve their heritage—to produce the items. Additionally, the duo selects a small number of traditional products to be part of their collection.

Things started off innocently enough with Pimentel and Williams. The two began sharing things that they'd bought in and around Olhão with friends. (“Cubista”, pronounced koo-BEESH-tah, refers to the cubist style of whitewashed buildings in older districts of their adopted town.) Spotting good design comes naturally to both of them. Toronto-born Pimentel, a teacher by trade, is from an Azorean Canadian family of weavers, crocheters, and woodworkers, and he was thrilled to get back in touch with his artisan roots. England-born Williams spent four years as creative director of Home for Hudson's Bay, where he was in charge of design and trend direction for furniture, housewares, and bed and bath.

Friends made introductions. “We met a brother-and-sister team who had taken over their family's tile-making business,” recalls Pimentel. “They invited us to their studio to make tiles by hand, using methods that date back to the 17th century. We were inspired by the traditional patterns they had been working with and asked if we could update them with a monochromatic palette.”

These first creations were so well received by design-minded friends around the world that the pair began looking for other local



artisans to collaborate with. “Step by step, we connected with potters, weavers, and carvers, and Casa Cubista began to develop into something for everyone involved,” Pimentel says.

“We knew we were on the right track when, out of the blue, we heard from Le Bon Marché, who wanted to carry our pottery collection in Paris,” says Williams. “It was a pinch me moment.”

The brand's handmade modern aesthetic is rooted in simplicity: these are naturally textured, well-made, down-to-earth, beautiful things, cheerful and homespun. That the designs appeal to multiple decor tastes has only amplified the buzz. As new items are added to the ever-growing Casa Cubista family, they complement what came before. Collections, released twice a year, are grouped by a particular design, each capturing a specific feeling tied to the overall look. The story behind each piece gives everything a sense of place.

“Rui, our potter, throws everything by hand, and his 60-year-old aunt paints all of our patterns,” Pimentel says. “His family has been in the pottery business for more than 200 years ... Then there's Júlia and Sérgio. Her family has been weaving baskets for decades. They originally made fishing baskets, and now they also make these great mid-century chairs.” The weavers behind the carpets, rugs, cushions, ottomans, and wall hangings use yarn made by spinning reclaimed thread from the fashion industry.

Over the past year, Pimentel and Williams travelled around Portugal meeting with potential Casa Cubista collaborators. It is a slow process as the team determines the best way to work with each artisan. “We're very excited about a potter who works with black clay, and there's a superminimal, matte black-and-white stoneware collection that feels very special too,” Williams says.

This creative collaboration keeps Pimentel and Williams doing what they do best. “We love shining a light on these people.” ●

Photos: Casa Cubista, a contemporary collection of homewares, textiles, tiles, decor, and accessories, is the creation of David Pimentel and Arren Williams, who work closely with Portuguese craftspeople and family-owned makers to communicate the story behind each product.