



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Designer Debby Tenquist • A bountiful view of The Garden of St Christopher in Johannesburg, a project that took Tenquist five years to complete • Samples of her *Incredible India* collection



Changing Her Canvas

After a career in garden design, Debby Tenquist brings botanicals inside the home with an exuberant line of textiles

By KIRK REED FORRESTER

A RENAISSANCE WOMAN in a modern moment, South African designer Debby Tenquist has as many talents as she has interests. During her studies in decorative arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the South Africa native realized that many decorative artists were also architects and gardeners, so by a scholarly osmosis, she learned about historical gardens and the principles of their design.

After a stint working for Sotheby's auction house and a turn working in antique valuations, Tenquist decided to try her hand at landscape architecture back in Johannesburg. She was fortunate to get commissions that excited her from the start and soon had a bustling business, culminating in her work on

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The Garden of St Christopher—a private garden open by appointment—in the city’s Hyde Park.

Even so, Tenquist itched for a change in medium. In 2015, she set her sights on textiles, an art form she had studied and long admired. “Textiles have always had an enormous role to play in society,” she says. “The stories and subjects that are used reflect the faith and belief systems of people. The symbols have great meaning. A lot of that is lost today, but there’s a huge swing back toward artisanal objects. People are looking for less technology in their lives. There’s a simplicity in the exotic and ethnic designs in textiles that people are drawn to.”

Though Tenquist had an artistic background, she hadn’t put pen to paper in 35 years. But once she started drawing (she uses a pen on an iPad), she felt invigorated. She named her line Botanica Trading with the goal of creating botanically inspired textiles with a modern sense of scale and size. Her first collection, *Incredible India*, launched in the United States last August to rave reviews.

Tenquist is enjoying the change in perspective. “Designing a garden, one uses very broad, sweeping strokes; you have to see the big picture the whole time. The Garden of St Christopher took five years and was 7 acres. One almost had to see it from above. Moving from that enormous canvas to this tiny canvas has been a revelation.”

With a follow-up collection based on the Ottoman Empire in the works and an expansion into chinoiserie wallpaper, Tenquist is relishing her return to the decorative arts.

No matter the media; however, her ultimate inspiration will always be the natural world. “Anything that draws us towards nature is important,” says Tenquist. “It’s where our roots lie.” ❧

ABOVE: “Textiles are very much a cultural and artistic expression of the times,” says Tenquist, who draws from her love of nature and Oriental and European decorative arts for her fabrics. TOP: Her design for The Garden of St Christopher mixes formal elements with a romantic palette.

PHOTOS BY MARIANNE SWANKHART (LEFT) AND ELSA YOUNG