

# Business News

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## Labor of love

### Furniture designer helps artisans from her native Brazil

**T**hey say that one person's trash is another one's treasure. And where some might see worthless rubbish, Brazilian architect and furniture designer Andrea Fonseca sees a chance to help her homeland's artisans while preserving the rain forest.

Last February, Ms. Fonseca opened Brazil Baroque, a Santa Barbara store selling hand-crafted Baroque-style furniture. The furniture designed by Ms. Fonseca is made of hardwood recycled from decrepit and long-abandoned houses found in many of Brazil's colonial villages.

Ms. Fonseca's love for the land and people of Brazil, as well as finding the love of her life in Santa Barbara, gave her the idea to start the business.

She first came to Santa Barbara from Rio de Janeiro in 1998 to study English. That year she met local resident Marc Tappeiner and fell in love. They married in 2000 and now live in Montecito.

Ms. Fonseca had bigger goals than simply designing and selling furniture to clients. She wanted to find a way to help Brazilian artisans in Minas Gerais find a market for their work, and she wanted her enterprise to have minimal impact on Brazil's environment and rain forest.

### shop talk

MARIA ZATE

"For these artisans it's not about the money. Of course that's important and they need it, but what they really want is someone to appreciate the quality of their work," she said. "And it's also very hard for them to sell their work in Brazil, where most people make only \$100 a month."

When the first shipment of furniture arrived last November, Ms. Fonseca had no storage space or store. A friend introduced her to local contractor Jack Byers and his wife Karen, who owned a building at the corner of Cota and Chapala streets. The Byers lived in Brazil 20 years ago and knew what life was like there, Ms. Fonseca said. They agreed to let her use the space at 535 Chapala St.

"They believed in my mission," she said. "I told them I didn't have money to pay them right away, but I knew in a couple of months I could prove that the furniture would sell."

Ms. Fonseca was right. With the help of a sales representative in Los Angeles, Brazil Baroque quickly sold most of its introductory pieces. A new shipment of inventory is arriving this week.

"It's not about selling one piece of art or furniture," Ms. Fonseca said. "It's about selling a whole experience, and selling things that mean something. I think Americans are looking for that."

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MIKE ELIASON / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Andrea Fonseca, owner of Brazil Baroque, has found a way to blend commerce and social responsibility: Her line of furniture is made of recycled hardwood from abandoned houses in Brazilian villages. She also sells water jars like the ones at left, which were once used to collect rain in many rural villages in Brazil's dry countryside but now help residents there generate an income.

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