

The Red Book Stories

ANTIQUES ART CURIOSITIES CULTURE DESIGN SHOP



A Shared Sensibility: Maya Romanoff & PAGODA RED

“Kindness and generosity,” are the words Joyce Romanoff uses again and again to describe her late husband, Maya. “It was important to him to create a community of people from all walks of life,” she recalls. “The heart of our company is our people.” Today, [Maya Romanoff](#) is the largest manufacturer of handmade wallcoverings in the United States with a workshop that employs dozens of artisans, but it started as an extension of Maya’s artistic experimentation.



Fresco wallcovering by Maya Romanoff with PAGODA RED [meditation stone](#) and [reclaimed elm table](#).

In the 1960s, Maya traveled throughout Africa and Asia and learned tie-dyeing, which he later translated into tapestries and wallcoverings. Joyce joined the company in 1988 as head of sales and grew it into what it is today — a brand that’s helped to redefine luxury as the marriage of story, substance and skilled craft.

With specialty workshops in the United States, Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Japan, France and Portugal, the company is keeping local craft traditions alive. “Our workshops have handcraft in their heritage,” Joyce says. As the business grew, so did their relationship and in 1998, Joyce and Maya married. Since Maya’s passing in 2014 after a 20-year struggle with Parkinson’s Disease, she remains CEO of the company and keeper of his legacy.



Fresco wallcovering by Maya Romanoff with PAGODA RED [vinegar jars](#) and [reclaimed elm table](#).

Their partnership is a touchstone for the company, and she returned to his earlier designs to re-imagine new releases. Fresco, inspired by Roman ruins, was originally developed by Maya in the late 1980s.

“It’s made of a gesso that we color and cure,” Joyce explains, “so it’s a very strong product. It’s a thin layer of stone-like material that can wrap columns. It’s so beautiful, Maya used to paint on it as a canvas.”

A new take on a classic material, it’s a natural complement to PAGODA RED’s [meditation stones](#), glazed ceramic [vinegar jars](#) and [reclaimed elm tables](#). In fact, there is a shared sensibility between Maya Romanoff’s collections and the quiet consideration of Asian design.

Maya Romanoff was a member of Chicago’s Buddhist Temple and kept a regular meditation practice all his life. He was also inspired by the Japanese dedication to craft and process.

“He was supremely attached to Japan,” Joyce recalls, “Their rituals, their way of living and the commitment to doing everything in a subtle, very sophisticated way. For him, the glamour was the process.”

The Japanese system of apprenticeship and learning also informed the way the company built their workshop. Before launching a product, artisans experiment with a surface to find just-the-right balance — measuring and matching colors until they arrive at the perfect formula.



Shimmering Burlap wallcovering by Maya Romanoff with PAGODA RED [meditation stone](#) and [parquetry cabinet](#).

For example, a new surface called Shimmering Burlap was originally developed as a custom covering for architect Andre Kikoski. It combines coarse jute and reflective mica to create a rough-meets-refined feeling, but the creation of the pattern uses scientific precision. Each area of glue is carefully measured, so that the mica is evenly distributed across the surface. Then, multiple layers of mica are brushed on to reflect light and create the textural play of rough and luxe surfaces.



Fresco wallcovering by Maya Romanoff with PAGODA RED [vessels](#) and [console table](#).

From the union of ancient methods and modern design to the merger of high-and-low tech, it all stems from Maya's original approach. In everything they did, he and Joyce brought together diverse aspects of themselves and their company into a whole.

“He was an artist; not a designer,” Joyce says. “He had a very unique vision that the people who are working for us share. Their children grow up to work for us; it’s like a family. We’re all coming into work to make something beautiful.”

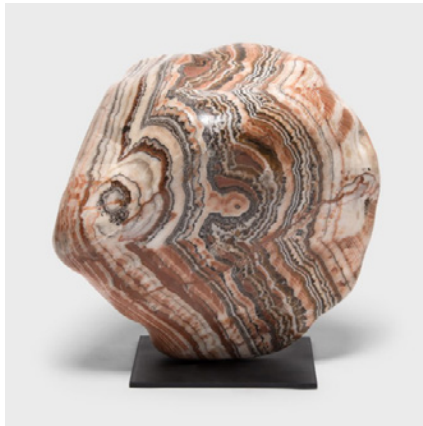
To learn more, visit mayaromanoff.com



Inspired by Maya Romanoff



Mixed Parquetry Cabinet



Nan Yang Meditation Stone



Japanese Sake Bottle

