

# Town & Country

PHILIPPINE EDITION

**TINA  
OCAMPO**

MAKES HER MARK  
ON LUXURY

FASHION  
HOUSES  
OF THE '50s

TORY  
BURCH'S  
STYLE

DRESSED AND  
BEJEWELLED  
FOR SPRING

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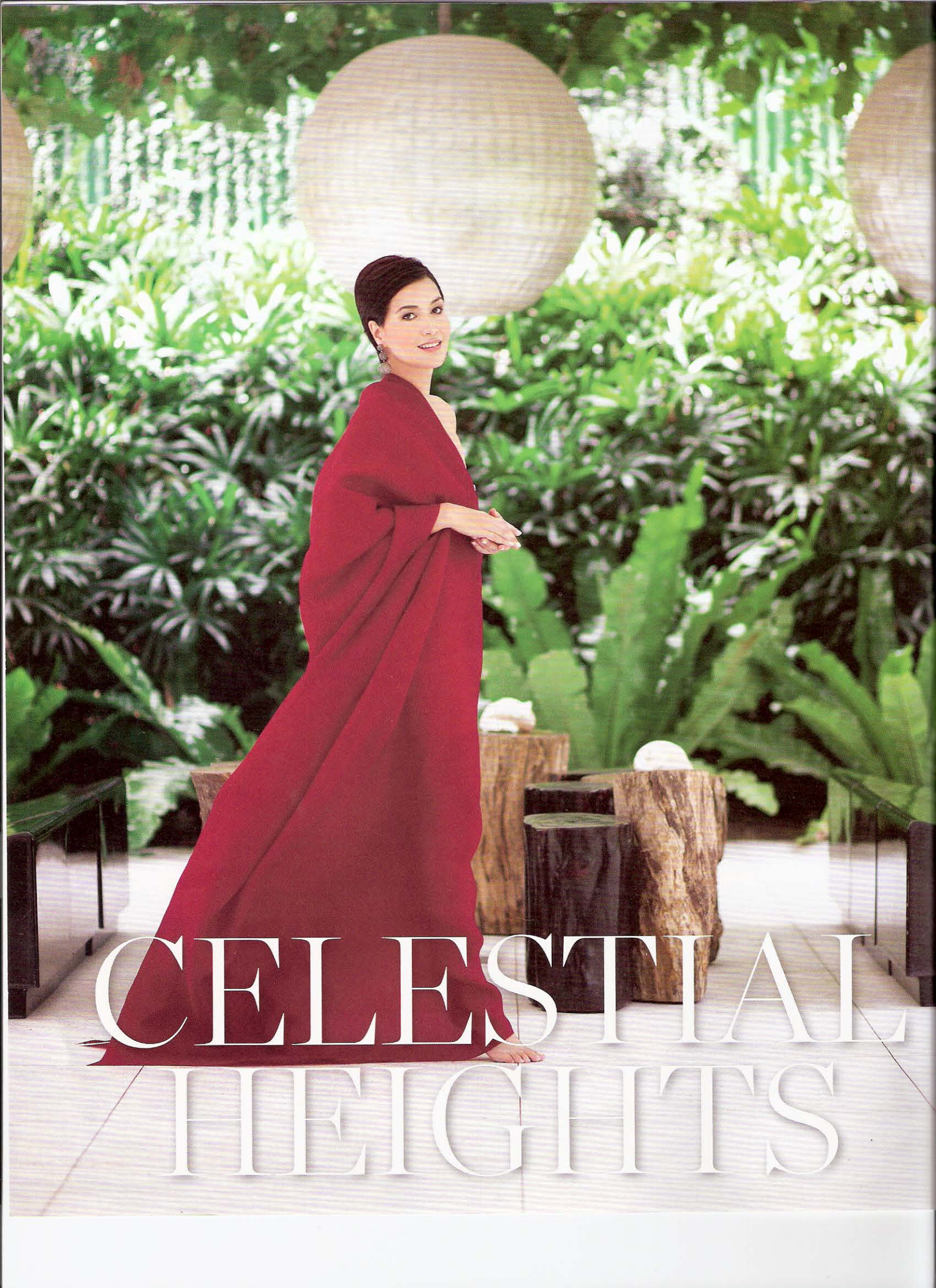
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TOWN AND COUNTRY



SUMMIT  
MEDIA

Tina Ocampo in Vera Wang Lavender Label





# CELESTIAL HEIGHTS



The international success of  
**TINA MARISTELA-OCAMPO'S**  
luxury brand, Celestina,  
is an inspiring tale of savvy  
and serendipity.

*By Sunshine Lichauco de Leon*

Photographs by *Paolo Pineda*

Architectural photographs by *Francisco Guerrero*

Styled by *Mia Borromeo*

**t**he instant Tina Maristela-Ocampo walks into a room, you feel the presence of a woman. A stunning vision of elegant perfection greets you—with her deeply chocolate brown eyes, chiseled face, and graceful movements. When she looks into your eyes and holds your glance for more than a few seconds, however, you catch a glimpse into something unexpected—her beautiful freckled face has many layers, and her smile hides both a vulnerability and a childlike demeanor, equally disarming and intriguing. Speak with her and you discover a woman who has the magical gift of being able to take the most basic “simple nothings” of our world and turn them into something so much more.

Ocampo's life is full of evolution. Having spent her early years as a professional model, she eventually married entrepreneur Ricco Ocampo, had four children and became an entrepreneur herself. Partnering with her husband, the innovative couple have opened successful businesses in the retail and restaurant industry. Her latest creative project is Celestina, a luxury brand made famous for its handcrafted, boxlike, clutch evening bags or minaudières. Large enough to hold only a lipstick, credit card and perhaps a tiny compact, each piece is an original work of art. Designs are inspired and made with indigenous materials from all over the Philippines, including mother of pearl, shells, mahogany, Philippine jade, shagreen, brass, copper and sterling silver. Although all of the Ocampo's businesses have left their mark, it is Celestina, the brand launched in 2006 after the name her mother gave her, which has elevated this driven lady to a player on the international fashion scene.

Perhaps one of the most interesting things about Ocampo is the paradox between her life and image as a model and muse, and the real persona that lies behind her appearance. “I am really shy,” she admits, “I cannot focus on a lot of people, especially if they are all focused on me. I get a bit... scared that people are looking.” How could that be, after ten years as a successful model? She says that as a ramp model, you don't see the audience at all because of the lights, and how conditioning herself not to see anyone enabled her to rise above the fear. “The thought of seeing a familiar face in the audience terrified me.” The same training applied to photo sessions, where her focus remains on the camera, not even seeing the photographer. Often told that she comes across as aloof and detached, I found that speaking with her proved the opposite to be quite true. When Ocampo is quiet, her face can deliver an intimidating coolness, but the moment



an idea excites her, the beautiful face breaks into a girlish smile and you are suddenly enveloped by warmth and eyes brimming with curiosity. She admits finding the act of shredding confidential documents at the end of each workday a form of relaxation, and giggles, "Am I weird?" Clearly, Ocampo has a healthy sense of humor.

The story of how the former model launched the Celestina line is an inspiring example of how a fleeting idea that floats through your head one day, with the right encouragement and opportunity, can quickly evolve into a dream come true.

It all started four years ago when she would regularly visit her daughter who was studying in Connecticut and ended up with lots of free time alone in New York City while waiting for her to join her on weekends. A unique combination of boredom and curiosity led her to often browse the accessories departments of her favorite shops, Barneys and Bergdorf's, and it was during one of these trips that she started to muse about coming up with her own business that would keep her busy during these parent weekends. Always very practical and goal-oriented by nature, Ocampo decided that if she started a business, the goal would be to get into these two top department stores. And although she had no idea as to what product she would make, it would certainly be something that did not involve sizing.

As fate would have it, Ocampo returned to Manila after one of these trips to find that her husband had just designed and produced a sample of a line of little boxes made with local natural materials that he wanted to export. She recounts, "I looked at his first sample, which was made of mother of pearl with sterling silver, and really thought that the box looked like a bag. So I called the manufacturer and asked if he could make it into a bag for me. His answer was predictable—'But ma'am, it's a box.'" She then patiently demonstrated to him where to put a hinge and how to hide it, where to put a clasp, and showed him the new way that this new future prototype would be carried. Her hands help her to draw the picture she was describing, "Imagine it's going to be this big, and thick, and wrap it in shagreen, change the color of the lining to nice lamb skin and come back to me."

When the sample arrived two weeks later, it was so beautiful that her husband suggested that she make more—in fact, 25 more. When enough designs were made to form a collection, Ocampo called on her good friend Neil Oshima to photograph the line; a quick catalog was made and sent off to target buyers in New York and with that, the roots of Celestina's future were planted.

Trying to encourage those roots to grow into opportunity, however, took lots of faith and effort and, eventually, a stroke of magic. Not only were the Ocampos trying to tap into the toughest retail market in the world but they were also late in the sea-

son—they sent their catalogs in June 2006 and fashion week was in February! Although determined to get a response, their relentless efforts to reach appropriate buyers failed completely. Needing an unconventional solution, Ocampo sought out her good friend Rafé Totengco, an inspiringly successful New York-based Filipino bag designer, to ask for his opinion on her sample designs. Her eyes widen with excitement as she recalls, "I was thrilled because Rafé believed in my products and suggested that I should have a meeting with *Vogue*. I laughed out loud since no retail store had even agreed to meet me yet! You can imagine the look on my face when two minutes later he called *Vogue* accessories editor, Virginia Smith, and scheduled a meeting for the next day."

She remembers the experience in complete detail, and with a smile that seems to have lasted ever since that fateful day, "My heart was racing as we walked into the meeting and watched the seven creative accessory editors look at my 25 samples in silence. I was so nervous, I could barely get the words out 'these are all made in the Philippines, by hand...!' Luckily, I was not even able to finish my sentence before I heard the words 'beautiful' and 'never seen', and my confidence suddenly returned!" The group immediately inquired as to where the bags were being sold and when they learned that this was in fact the problem, they asked her instead where she wanted the bags to be sold. Although her first choice was Barneys because it serves as a reference store that people around the world look at to see the latest, she decided to give the experts a chance to advise her and asked for the team's opinion. The answer was music to her ears—Barneys it was. The momentum from this point onward was dizzying—a meeting was set with the store's accessories team the next day, orders were soon placed and Celestina was officially on its way to stardom. Participation in a trade show in Paris further spread the word, opening the door to exposure beyond Barneys, and Celestina's first bags were in stores across the U.S. by September 2006.

Since then, Hollywood actresses such as Drew Barrymore have carried the *pacquiao* design to the Emmys and Halle Berry was seen accompanied by the "session" style to her own movie premiere. Showing both a sentimental and a patriotic side, Ocampo named the internal coding system for the bags in her Fall 2006 Collection after her and Ricco's favorite places in Manila, and for Spring/Summer 2007, bags were named after Filipino icons such as Anita Magsaysay Ho.

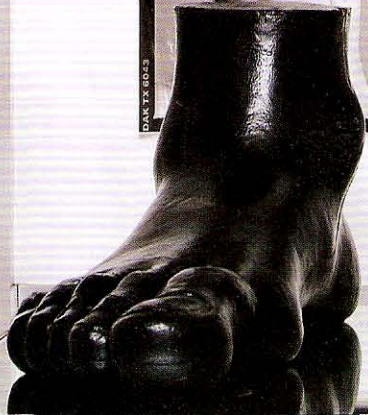
Although Celestina was launched with a line of minaudières, the brand has steadily expanded each season to include other luxury products such as sunglasses, fans and fine jewelry. Ricco Ocampo gets the credit for such foresight. His wife explains, "Ricco is a businessman and knows his stuff. He encouraged me



Vera Wang Lavender Label  
Strapless gown with gathered  
bodice in forest green silk  
with gold detail. Celestina  
Labing-apat 14k yellow-gold  
cocktail ring with lapis lazuli.  
Makeup by Eric Maningat.







A view of the foyer with a series of Tina's portraits by Neil Oshima.



## TINA'S STYLE

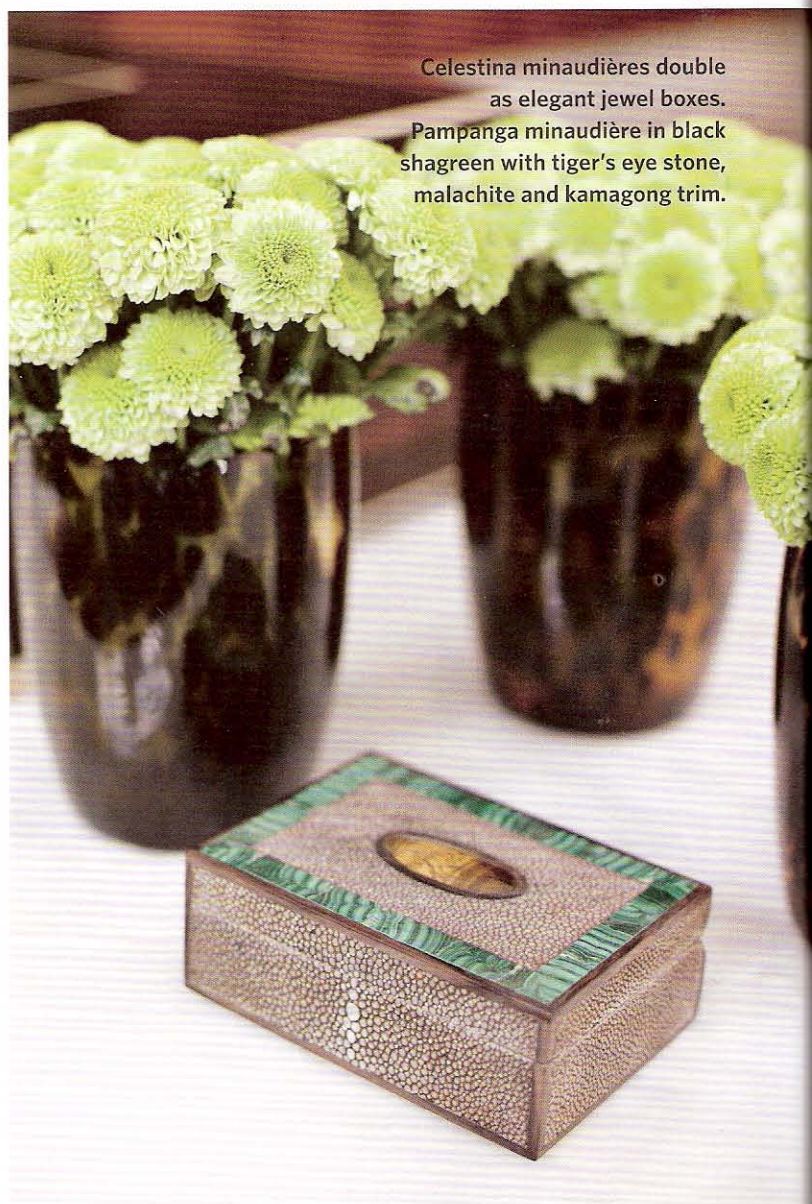
Tina believes style is a very personal thing, and that style is not limited to fashion alone—it can be a whole lifestyle. It's the way you fix your home, how you entertain, what you eat, how you serve it and how you prepare things. Since fashion is about image, modeling taught her to be innovative, creative and dramatic. Although she certainly learned a certain aesthetic from her modeling years, she feels she has an innate creative side, which helps her to recognize beauty and good quality. Tina says, "It's all about how you style yourself and put things together—although I never studied design, I can design products, do food styling, do flowers, table settings. I just love to make something from the things I see around me." A glimpse into Tina's home shows you that her passion to create extends from the office to her family life—every item is carefully placed, a unique piece of sculpture caught in its own moment, and in every corner you look, the beauty is truly in the detail.

Pacquiao etched mother-of-pearl clutch in sterling silver with stone clasps.



Bente-uno cuff in cracked mother-of-pearl with 14k gold and malachite detail.

Celestina minaudières double as elegant jewel boxes. Pampanga minaudière in black shagreen with tiger's eye stone, malachite and kamagong trim.



Celestina Bente-dos cuff in dark green shagreen with blackamoor of rhodite garnet cushion and drops, citrine drops and yellow sapphire.





**CELESTINA FASHION,**  
clockwise from top:

Anita Magsaysay-Ho clutch in eggshell; Maricel Soriano rainbow Paula in oxidized copper frame with black onyx clasps; Nora Aunor clutch in mother-of-pearl with malachite clasps; and Pito, a modernized tambourine pendant set in kamagong,



to design other products just in case shells and shagreen don't sell well after a while due to trends. I listened to his suggestion to take advantage of and learn from our many local jewelry makers, and with that, our line of fine jewelry was born."

Each piece of jewelry is unique and made with the same natural materials and by the same people who make Celestina's bags. Although a complete line is available—from rings to necklaces—the tambourine pendants are doing particularly well. The American market has never seen anything like it, and the product comes with a story, which she says Americans love. According to Ocampo, her tambourine necklaces are just a result of taking an original Colonial concept to another level; she explains that Filipino workers are used to designing them but the original idea of filigree work came from the Spaniards. These necklaces are another example of how Celestina is a collaboration of the best of Filipino crafts, and illustrates another way in which this innovator has created an original idea from a technique that has been around for centuries.

In terms of future plans for the brand, Ocampo believes in always moving forward and in the importance of maintaining an image of a luxury brand. She says rather matter-of-factly, "I can't introduce a line lower than I have now—it always has to go up, up, up!" It then becomes understandable why the brand started with minaudieres then moved to fine jewelry and on to crocodile-skin handbags and is now expanding to fur bags and accessories. Like all good leaders, this entrepreneur is also ready to get more people involved with her team because she says what began as a simple, naïve idea has turned into quite a workload. Although she will always oversee design, the need for collaboration has been recognized, and she stands ready to give direction and delegate.

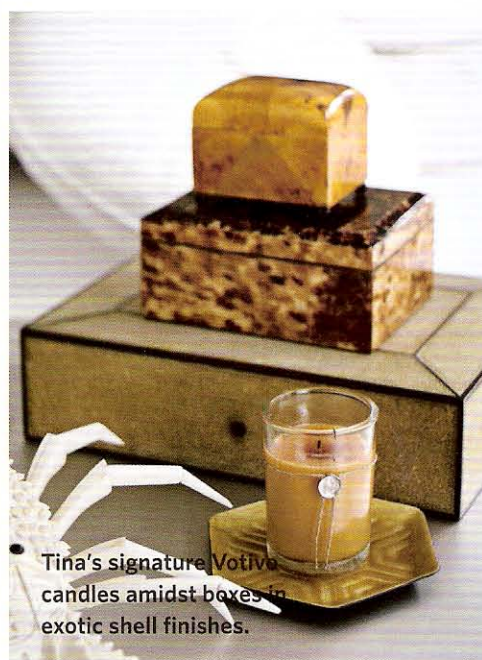
One of the greater challenges of these products being created is also one of the things that make it most unique. The Celestina team scours the Philippines in search of what raw materi-

**A charming "tablescape"**  
in the sitting room.





A favorite coffee set that Tina picked up from a flea market in Paris.



Tina's signature Votive candles amidst boxes in exotic shell finishes.



Top to bottom: Tatlo ivory bangles with tambourine details; Juliana envelope bag in lizard with pen shell clasp; and Emilio Aguilar Cruz gold-embroidered clutch with shagreen trim.





A crisp corner of the master bedroom.

Clockwise from left: Mer bag in red ostrich with *tagnipis* clasp; Joyce bag in brown cayman croc with brownlip shell handle; Hudson eyewear in red tab shell.



als, talent and skills they can bring to work together with. Since some of the places they work with are often far from each other, the challenge comes in being able to synchronize a very time-consuming production schedule in time to make the orders. For example, a typical design might require sourcing pearls from Davao, sending them to Baguio to be etched and sealed and then to Cebu for assembly. Ocampo says that “perfecting the production schedule is an ongoing process.”

Listening to her speak about her husband’s role in the company, it is obvious that they are polar opposites yet complementary enough to form the perfect team. “Ricco and I have completely different styles of management and skill sets. He sees the future and what is beyond the fence, which I can never see. He is people oriented, loves marketing, lots of noise, and working on five projects at the same time.” She goes on to describe herself with the clarity of someone who understands her own nature perfectly: “I would rather talk to you one on one. I like having systems and to work on my own and, to my husband’s frustration, can take days to finish one project.” Her husband, on the other hand does not like to control or have systems, so when he does have meetings he tells his staff what his plan is and instructs them to “just figure out how to do it. Tina, a born organizer, steps in often, to give the different departments the direction they need to make sure the work gets done right.

Although this style of working can be frustrating to someone who admits to being a control freak, Tina Ocampo, however, is the first to admit that it’s her husband who is the visionary and has the fantastic ideas. To highlight this fact, she explains that when she created that first sample bag from a box design, she had meant to keep it for personal use. It was



The light-filled lanai opens into the verdant garden.





her husband who made the connection between her budding desire to have a business that would reach New York markets and the ingenious product she had created.

Although the success of their businesses together over the past 15 years proves that their partnership has more than flourished, she is the first to admit that they have had to work hard to get through their differences and find a harmonious balance.

That place of balance, she says, emerged through maturity and partly because they got tired of arguing all the time. She looks reflective as she confides that she also made a lot of adjustments because she knew that her style of doing things always made him the “angel boss and the cool dad”, whereas she was the “strict mom and the witch boss”, and these were labels she really did not like. She adds philosophically, “I realize I have my own weaknesses and so accepting that I was not perfect helped me keep things in perspective and find that balance.”

Celestina has been an eye-opening experience for her on many levels. The one she speaks the most passionately about is that fact that she has built a business that allows her to find success and simultaneously support the artisans and small-scale craftsmen of the Philippines. Although admittedly this was not the goal in the beginning, she says, “Being able to help people to find new ways of using the same skill and trying to revive an art is becoming my mantra.”

She continues: “For example, the weavers of Baguio have sterling silver but have mainly been weaving things like baskets or

mats. Showing them that this silver can be used to make a bag instead proves to them that they don’t need to be stuck making the same traditional products.”

Celestina has grown to be represented by more than 80 stores worldwide. Like most things in Ocampo’s life, the decision to recently open a Celestina store in Greenbelt 5 in Makati was well thought out and purposeful. She says, “I opened the store with the hope that our story serves as an inspiration to other Filipinos. I think we have so much talent here, and I am not sure if it’s just that we Filipinos are not given the big breaks, not gutsy enough or not financially healthy enough to be able to come up with our own lines and try them abroad.” It is this businesswoman’s goal that the success of her story—given that she has never been a bag designer and that she started a new business in her mid-40s—will show people that anything is really possible if you allow yourself to follow your dreams, aim high and work hard.


As Ocampo appears to be a woman who always knows what she wants, what exactly does she want? Without missing a beat she says, “To be recognized as an accessory designer in Manhattan and for Celestina, to become an established name in the world. That’s my dream”.

She believes that Celestina’s success has been due to the right idea at the right time. Her creations are totally different from what the design world has seen so far. She describes the difference: “Our bags are very raw, yet luxurious on the inside because it is lined with lambskin. We just made a product out of something I saw in nature—I gave it a shape, a hinge, a clasp and before I knew it, it became a bag!”

As I listen to her speak, I remember my first experience meeting Tina. I walked into the “set” that her peaceful home had become for the photo shoot, and watched her intently as she expertly moved in front of the camera. She was in reality wearing only a beautiful piece of magenta fabric pinned together with a simple brooch, but for that moment, she had managed in her characteristic way to transform this piece of cloth into a gown fit for island royalty. A few seconds later, the wind, which had so carefully been caressing her movements within the fall of the fabric, died down and the look on her face grew slightly perplexed. Tina turned and looked at all of us and gently suggested, “We need to call the wind, let’s try it... please whistle...” We followed her lead in dreamlike silence, only to be roused a minute later by the sound of the wind having returned.

Like many iconic women before her, strength, focus and determination go a long way to explain Ocampo’s success. For this woman however, whose special wings are powered by her belief in her ability to influence her world in a manner that most others would consider impossible, there is no doubt that the road ahead will take her even above and beyond where she wants to go. ✕





Tina proudly brings Filipino design and craftsmanship to the rest of the world.  
Terno by Bubum Melgar.  
Celestina Trenta-dos 18k white-gold drop earrings.  
For Fashion details. See Fashion & Shopping Information.