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Laura and Juan, our fantastic hosts and cultural guides in Mexico.

COLOUR

UNO was recently in the colourful land of Mexico for our annual IDP meeting. It would be difficult to travel to Mexico, as we did just recently, and not discuss their amazing use of colour and explore some reasons as what has created this distinctive relationship between Mexicans and their love for vibrancy and contrast.

The 2009 union was hosted by Laura Medina Mora,

owner and Creative Director of BrandLab, a brand and packaging design specialist, with their main office located in Mexico City.

During our stay there, which also involved a short stay in the Yucatán, we took the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the culture of Mexico, which was made easier by the

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Mexico City, a profusion of colour and texture. Images kindly supplied by our mate Carsten Buck at Mutter Design Hamburg, who had numerous Kodak moments!

warmth and hospitable nature of our local and knowledgeable hosts.

MEH-HEE-CO!

Mexico City is constantly abuzz and it was with a little trepidation that we ventured out onto the streets, given the recent publicity surrounding the 'war' being waged by the government on the drug barons. Fortunately for us, and our families back in Australia, this is largely in the North of the country near the border with the US. Firstly it has to be emphasised that the sheer size and density of Mexico City is almost overwhelming. The traffic during the waking hours feels like a constant screening of Death Race 2000 and

conflicts starkly with any preconception that Mexicans are laid back.

Mexico City is situated fairly centrally in the country and is framed by an encircling ring of mountains.

The population of Mexico City is enormous being only slightly less than the whole of Australia and you get a real feel for the size of the city from the air, when you notice that you've been flying over it, and later you're still flying over it. Looking down on the city, seeing it nestled like a bloated but hyperactive baby in a tiny pusher, we could feel a palpable wave of energy come up from the densely massed buildings below.

Having known our host Laura Medina Mora for many years we have seen how colour and its vibrancy and contrast are so distinctive of Mexican design. This was clear even when travelling through the city. The use of fabricated signage is used almost exclusively by franchise stores or by the more expensive branded retailers, however smaller independents use hand painted signs often with additional messages alongside and the buildings are often brightly coloured, with reds and greens being the shades of choice. This personalised style makes every street unique, with the mix of richly coloured buildings and characterful signage becoming emblematic of Mexican culture.



Entry corridor (or vein) to one of Mexico's upmarket and very secure shopping precincts.



Art from the walls of 'El Bajío', a fantastic restaurant that served the best in traditional Mexican cuisine.



A procession of sculptures to celebrate the 'Day of the Dead', an iconic Mexican festival.

Following our first few days in Mexico City we travelled to the Yucatán Peninsula to meet with a group of Mayan artisans. Laura, our host, had been working with a national cultural foundation, supported by one of Mexico's largest banks. Their ongoing task is to support these traditional cultures, which like many others around the planet, are being eroded by external forces, such as an opening of markets, access to cheaper goods etc.

The Yucatán area was the cultural centre for the ancient Mayans and many of their old communities with their distinctive pyramids are located near to the state capital of Merida. The use of colour in this area was more limited, with many buildings being white or unpainted, which may be due partly to this area being less wealthy and also that colour was often used to honour special events. This was shown in the small town of Izamal, where the large central church



A creation for Mexico's 'Day of the Dead' celebrations.

overlooks the town, resting as it does on the foundations of the old Mayan temple. The town was the site of a papal visit in 1993 and for this occasion all the buildings in the town centre, the church, the convent, colonial buildings and homes were painted yellow.

The sense of colour in the Yucatán was more clearly demonstrated by the artisans of the area, the most well known being the embroiderers. The skill of embroidery is one that has been passed down from mother to daughter since Mayan times and is an intrinsic part of the culture. The colours used in the embroidery reflected the strength of colour found in the local landscape, with its abundance of vibrant tropical plants and flowers, which often contrasted starkly against the sun baked soil



Cathedral at Izamal - all aglow in Gold



It was towards the end of our stay when dining with other members of the IDP at a fantastic hacienda that I thought I'd cracked or at least glimpsed the code for colour in Mexico and this moment of enlightenment occurred while watching Juan, the vibrant husband of our host, appear to have gone a little too 'supersize' with a particularly spicy chilli sauce, the code was spice, the sensation of grabbing your palette, shaking it abruptly awake with a sudden flash of heat and taste, and to part-time chilli warriors, a certain degree of pain. This attack on the senses is difficult to ignore and the use of colour is as intense. Small sprinklings add interest and give a twist to the everyday, larger doses and then the whole affair really starts to kick on, your heart beats faster, your senses go into overdrive and you realise you are in-fact alive, at least till the Tequila arrives!



A Mayan artisan displays a hand embroidered 'Huipil'.

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