

CERAMICS CLAY FEAT

LASTING BEAUTY OF PORTUGUESE POTTERY

TEXT BY BARBARA DINERMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
CARLOS DOMENECH



In the fifteenth century, the small but powerful nation of Portugal sent out navigators, making it the first European country to trade with East Africa and India. Goa, the last of the three Indian cities to be taken by Afonso de Albuquerque in 1510, became the capital of the Portuguese State of India (which lasted until 1961). Even the French envied Portugal's reigning monarch, Dom Manuel, whom Francis I dubbed "*le roi*

épicier" for his flourishing trade with China and the Spice Islands. Indeed, the sea route was secured by Vasco da Gama's historic expedition of 1497 in search of "Christians and spices." Other nations incorporated the news of Portugal's mercantile prominence into their art. Flemish tapestries in the early sixteenth-century depict Portuguese hunters and traders in Africa. Japanese screens of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are

At Fabrica Sant'Anna's factory in Lisbon, a Pombaline pot awaits its traditional blue and white scene. Baroque scrolls and stylized foliage are from the reign of Dom João V (1706-1750). After firing, the colors change in hue and value.



decorated with watercolors of long-nosed merchants bargaining for lacquers, silks, porcelain and tea. And Portuguese became the first European language of commerce.

Such vaunted trade with the East gave the newly prosperous Portuguese a craving for Chinese porcelains and textiles in their homes. By the seventeenth century, Lisbon's faience factories became the first to imitate Oriental porcelain. A stronger sense of color and ornamentation floated in from the East, altering the national taste for Moorish-style decoration that Portugal

had inherited in the fourteenth century; this Arab heritage is still seen in the vibrant, gleaming polychrome ceramic tiles, *azulejos*, that cover, like mosaics, entire walls of convents, palaces and churches.

The surface decoration that the Portuguese have admired since the fourteenth century, and which became Portugal's national signature when its own factories opened two centuries later, is echoed in its ubiquitous pottery, its faience.

The origins of early Portuguese faience, called Talavera pottery, are cloudy, since there were no facto-

ABOVE LEFT: Pottery by Sant'Anna artisans references the past. Dom João V pot, *left on shelf*, with mythological animals against floral ground, indicates late 18th-century origins, when yellows and greens were introduced. Blue and white pieces with outlines of sepia, perhaps in imitation of Chinese porcelain, though the mythological figures are of Portuguese invention. Flower-seller figure, 19th-century, a *pregao* peculiar to Lisbon. Covered box from an original mold of the Rato factory. Italian-inspired orange plate in 17th-century *damasco* pattern of flowers and fruit. Arab-style ewer, late 18th century. Rouen-style filigree decorates a vessel that also suggests Chinese porcelain design. TOP RIGHT: Vase inspired by Italian Renaissance. ABOVE RIGHT: Arab-style castle mixed with an 18th-century Portuguese geometric pattern. All photographed at Hotel Lapa Palace, Lisbon.