

A nighttime photograph of a cityscape, likely São Paulo, Brazil. The scene is dominated by several tall, modern buildings with illuminated windows, creating a warm glow against the dark blue twilight sky. A prominent feature is a tall, lattice-structured tower on the left side, which appears to be a telecommunications or radio tower. In the background, a bridge with numerous cables is visible on the left. The overall atmosphere is urban and vibrant.

The Art Road

Carlos Motta's Guide to São Paulo

ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S HOTTEST DESIGNERS
SHARES HIS PERSONAL INSIGHTS INTO BRAZIL'S
"CRAZY, FUN, CRUEL, INTERESTING" CITY

By Jennifer Parker



Clockwise from top left: The city center of São Paulo; The Octavio Frias de Oliveira bridge, crossing over the Pinheiros River; Motta's Carcará lamp made from local reclaimed wood, and Nagayama Restaurant, a favorite of Motta's when he ventures out on the town.



Carlos Motta sits on his "Pinda Chair," which sells at Espasso Gallery, in New York for \$56,000.

At first, São Paulo is overwhelming. A massive concrete jungle, it is the most populous city in the Southern Hemisphere. It also happens to be a cultural powerhouse.

Many of Latin America's most talented artists and architects are based here, filling the galleries, museums, ateliers, and theaters with cutting-edge work. Increasingly, they're being recognized internationally at festivals like Art Basel Miami and New York and Paris Fashion Weeks. And in 2016, the world's attention will be coming to them.

When Carnival celebrations begin in February, Brazil will welcome thousands of travelers to its shores. In São Paulo, as in Rio, feather-clad revelers will fill the parade stadium, called the Sambadrome, singing and samba dancing their way through ecstatic crowds marking the annual pre-Lent blowout. After this, the streets will barely have time to clear before São Paulo Fashion Week, in April, and the Summer Olympics, in August, attract fresh crowds to Brazil's Atlantic coast.

For celebrated Brazilian designer Carlos Motta, "São Paulo is "crazy, fun, cruel, interesting," he says. "It can be very surprising, as it is still developing. You find spontaneous art on the city walls, under bridges, in unexpected places."

Motta has been living and making furniture in his São Paulo atelier since the 1970s. A longtime surfer and fisherman at the nearby Astúrias beach, he is known for his natural, statuesque pieces made of reclaimed Brazilian wood. Essentially, he was practicing sustainability long before it became fashionable.

São Paulo, with its raw urban landscape bordered by subtropical forest and a rugged coastline, provides Motta with an ideal stage on which to pursue his artistic goal of creating a "deeper connectedness" between people and their natural environment. The city's architecture has been a particular inspiration for Motta. "Famous architects like Paulo Mendes da Rocha, Lina Bo Bardi, and João Batista Vilanova Artigas have very important

concrete buildings in the city. But I also find good anonymous design and architecture in the favelas," he says.

The safest way to get around the city is in one of the ubiquitous taxis. A good place to start is at the Brazilian Museum of Sculpture, considered da Rocha's masterpiece. Located in the Jardim Europa, the building's multiple levels, framed by an immense beam, form an exterior plaza graced with reflecting pools of water. A fifteen-minute drive from there, on Paulista Avenue, is the Museu de Arte de São Paulo. Designed by Lina Bo Bardi, the 1968 concrete-and-glass structure is considered a masterpiece of modern Brazilian architecture. (It also happens to house the best art collection in South America.) To cap off the architectural portion of your tour, visit the signature work of the father of Brazilian modernist architecture, Vilanova Artigas, the São Paulo School of Architecture, known for its large atriums and skylighted studios.

Viewed up close, these buildings inspire new ideas and concepts. To process what you've seen, Motta recommends taking a walk in Ibirapuera Park. Covering 545 acres, with striking monuments and extensive jogging and walking trails, it is São Paulo's Central Park. "[It] has beautiful old trees, lush landscapes, and vendors sell good coconut water. I like to go there and look at the beautiful iconic buildings by Oscar Niemeyer [a contemporary of Vilanova Artigas]," says Motta.

For something a bit livelier, Motta recommends Vila Madalena, the "bohemia" of São Paulo, where he has his acclaimed atelier. It's



a true creative center as well as an up-and-coming neighborhood where you'll find design stores and fashion boutiques. In addition to his own shop, Motta recommends Osklen, designer Oskar Metsavaht's haute couture clothing store. Still, this isn't Fifth Avenue. The streets are splattered with rebellious, gritty art. "In the back of my atelier, there is a very long and narrow street, almost an aisle, where all the walls are covered in graffiti," says Motta.

ATELIER CARLOS MOTTA

GORDON VIA FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS



Motta spends his free time surfing and fishing the blue waters of Asturias beach, São Paulo.

“São Paulo, together with Milan and New York, are the cities where you have a chance to find the best restaurants ever”

“This is the typical high-quality street art of São Paulo.”

By night the neighborhood’s restaurants and bars attract stylish revelers. “I like to have my meals at home, with the organic foods from my farm. But I believe that São Paulo, together with Milan and New York, are the cities where you have a chance to find the best restaurants ever,” says Motta. Number one on his list is Nagayama: “It has the best Japanese food, with an intimate charming atmosphere.” Adegas Santiago, which specializes in the cuisine of the Iberian Peninsula, is another favorite, for its fresh grilled octopus and “the best bacalhau” — a Portuguese dish of dried salted cod fish. For a traditional Brazilian churrascaria, Motta recommends Barbacoa, in the city’s central Itaim Bibi district, just a stone’s throw from the Brazilian Museum of Sculpture.

STAY

HOTEL FASANO

Rua Vittorio Fasano, 88
fasano.com.br

VISIT

MUSEU DE ARTE DE SÃO PAULO

Avenida Paulista, 1578
masp.art.br

BRAZILIAN MUSEUM OF SCULPTURE

Av. Europa, 218
mube.art.br

EAT

NAGAYAMA

Rua Bandeira Paulista 369
nagayama.com.br

BARBACOA

Rua Dr. Renato Paes de Barros, 65
barbacoa.com.br/

Motta also has some recommendations about where to stay in the city. “Hotels are very similar everywhere in São Paulo. Try to rent a place instead, even if it’s just for one day,” he says. “Go to the street fair, buy your food, use the city bikes, be a citizen.” Airbnb offers plenty of attractive options in this concrete jungle, especially in Vila Madalena.

Travelers who want to see and be seen should check in downtown at Hotel Fasano, a sexy, five-star retreat, with clubby leather furniture, a Brazilian modern art collection, and a sophisticated Italian restaurant designed by Isay Weinfeld and Marcio Kogan. But that’s not exactly Motta’s speed. When he has free time, you won’t find him in cocktail bars or schmoozing with gallery owners. “I leave the city and go surfing at Asturias beach or go to a secluded area on the farm behind my atelier to find inspiration,” he says.

Despite his modest and secluded lifestyle, Motta manages to find his way into galleries around the world. Last fall, New York’s Espasso Gallery celebrated the 40th anniversary of his São Paulo atelier with a Motta retrospective. His newest work, unveiled in December, was a hit at Art Basel Miami Beach. Exhibitions at Museu da Casa Brasileira, in São Paulo, however are most meaningful to him. It was here that his late mentor, Sergio Rodrigues, presented him with a design award in 1987. “It was so important to me to receive the award from his hands,” says Motta, his eyes welling up with tears. But through them, he managed a smile. ◀