

EXPO

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Mallorca might be an idyllic magnet for holidaymakers but not everyone here wants to make their money from tourism – and the island is also home to manufacturers, makers and artists determined to create vibrant businesses and singular art. These are people who have fought hard to succeed, gaining an international reputation in the process.

IF I CAN
MAKE IT
HERE...


The story seems to be a simple one: meet the people who are producing design products, fashion, furniture and world-class art in Mallorca and tell the story of their successes – and, hopefully, how working on this Mediterranean island also allows them to have something of a sun-kissed life. Because with the pandemic finally shuffling off stage, and the great reset under way, perhaps these people's tales could also offer readers a route to a different future. The reality turns out to be bit different.

Over two days, MONOCLE crosses back and forth over the islands and the people we meet tell us stories that are packed with challenges, of problems that need confronting and how their many triumphs often come down to personal bloody-minded determination and some modern business attitudes. Although it seems that everyone still somehow gets to enjoy the island life too.

One of the biggest problems is that Mallorca has a love-hate relationship with mass tourism. There have been moves to stop new hotels being built and to curtail the use of Airbnb but the cruise ships keep coming, the package-holiday flights are back in force, and it's hard for factories or craft studios to access government help, let alone find apprentices to work in out-of-the-way villages. In many of the factories that we visit, there are no young people to be seen. How can these last vestiges of Mallorca's storied shoe and fabric industries survive, you wonder. "We have tried but people don't want to work like this," says Maribel Bujosa at her family's textile factory. "They want to be in front of a computer."

And yet all of the creative folk we meet have become skilled navigators, able to go out into the world and sell. The concrete factory is a huge success because of the dynamism of Biel Huguet; Juan Peralta and Mauricio Obarrio at Contain are just nailing it; Isabel Rotger might struggle to find staff but just walk into her shop in Palma's Santa Catalina and you see the value of what she does. And she stresses that, "Here you can leave the office in May at 18.30 and jump in the sea. There's a great airport, so I can get a plane for €40 and go to an exhibition or the opera in Madrid."

What's also impressive about island business life is that everyone knows each other; Huguet has worked with Contain, Bujosa with Marlene Albaladejo. There's a support network of like-minded people usually just a walk away if they ever need it. And then there's the role that Mallorca plays in people's work. For some it provides inspiration; for others it perhaps helps with brand storytelling. But these are not local players; through sheer force of character they have all become international. To make this move they have made friends with the FedEx folk but also used social media – for brands on the island it has become a vital sales tool. Contain says that it has been so effective that they no longer attend trade fairs (it helps to have a photogenic crew).

MONOCLE came away bowled over by the ingenuity and talent. We were impressed at people's sheer drive to be at the top of their game – and still get to the beach. — 

1. The Contain team, with company founders Juan Peralta (seated, holding Aldo the dog) and Mauricio Obarrio, standing behind him



1. Juan Morell Bennasser with his Resmes boards made with partner Elena García Colchero
2. Contain wall lights
3. Alabaster pendant
4. Guillermo Barceló and his Equilateral Project
5. Anna Lena Kortmann



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Light fantastic
Contain, lighting and furniture

MONOCLE met Mauricio Obarrio and Juan Peralta of Contain in 2019 when the Argentinians were running their lighting and furniture company from a studio in Palma's old town. Now they have 14 staff and a bigger HQ in El Terreno. "We have grown quickly," says Peralta. Their lamps are stunning – from alabaster and brass pendants to modular chandeliers and 1950s-inspired floor lights – and their way of doing business is key to their progress. "We sell direct but we are not an e.com site," says Peralta. "There are no prices on the website. It's very personalised and you have to contact us to place an order." And Obarrio explains why. "We give people a customised product; they are creating the product with us." So you choose the colour of a lamp stand, select materials and finishes. This sense of involvement means that people are happy to wait 60 days for a delivery – even big hotel and hospitality contracts. The atmosphere is fun at Contain; people clearly love coming to work. Peralta and Obarrio also take their team for breaks and give them a chance to pursue their own projects.

It's an illuminating mix of joy and hard graft.
contain.es



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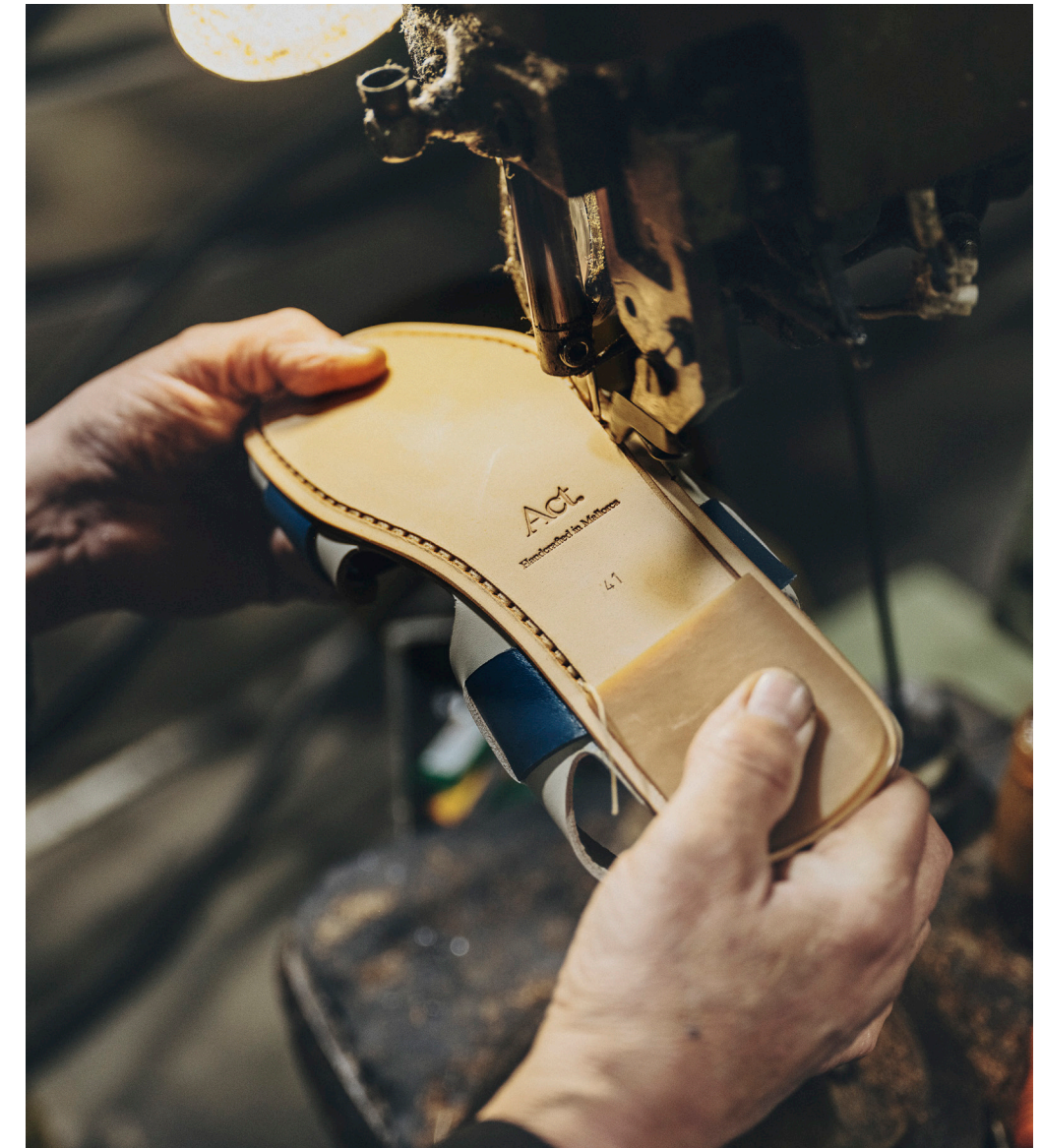
Benchmark performance
Studio Jaia, furniture

Anna Lena Kortmann grew up in Cairo, studied in Mainz, Melbourne and Paris, and became an interior architecture and exhibition designer in Los Angeles and, for 10 years, Berlin. But she was after something – and somewhere – else. She knew Mallorca from holidays and started spending time on the island, initially working remotely on architecture projects but perhaps looking for a reason to put down roots and use her hands again.

"I missed the creation part and working with materials and here, in Mallorca, I discovered these traditional chairs with beautiful weaving," says Kortmann. "I found someone who taught me how to do the weaving. It was not a business idea to start with but it became one." Three years ago, Kortmann started her firm, making everything herself, including tapping into her woodworking skills to build the furniture. "I changed the frames as I didn't want to use dark wood and I found a finer cord – a recycled cotton. After that I didn't want to stop." She has moved into a small shop-cum-atelier on a stepped narrow street in Palma, so people walk past and see her weaving the seats for her impeccable sleek-lined stools and benches. And her trade is prospering.

studiojaia.com

1. Isabel Rotger in her Palma shop
2. Act's suede slip-ons
3. 'Walter' shoes
4. Summer shoes in production
5. Stitching soles in Mancor de la Vall



It's a shoe-in
Act, footwear

We meet Isabel Rotger, owner of Act, in Mancor de la Vall, a 1,500-person community in the shadows of the Tramuntana mountains. The town is quiet bar the rattling factory making shoes for luxury houses and which has now started working with Rotger. It's one of four Spanish factories that makes her footwear for women and men; a collection of some 30 styles. But her story owes as much to Berlin as Mallorca. "I am a huge electronic-music fan and one weekend went with a friend from Madrid, where I was living, to Berlin," she says. "As the plane came into land I looked down and said, 'I think I am going to stay'." And she did. To improve her German she helped a friend who distributed fashion brands and suggested that they start their own line. "I said, 'We could take the classic espadrilles and do them in a way so that you can wear them in the city.'" That was 2013 and the espadrilles proved a hit. Rotger left Berlin after three years: "I couldn't stand the rain. I kept the brand and moved back to Madrid. When I was about to hit 40, I decided that it was time to come home to Mallorca." (Her dad is from Pollença, her mum, Palma). And here she has built her beautiful brand.

act-series.com



Vintage by design
La Pecera, furniture

Marlene Albaladejo has a shop in Palma – La Pecera or the “fishbowl” – that sells the furniture she produces on the island, including a rocking chair, a comfy armchair with leather or bulrush-woven seat, and the Saturn stool with its plump cushion of woven palm. The collection, Edicions de Disseny LPM, features simple lines and easy-on-the-eye materials but there is nothing simple or easy about producing in Mallorca, she says. “When I opened this shop in 2006, I sold vintage pieces but I am an industrial designer and I wanted to produce in Mallorca. In the villages, I saw all these amazing old pieces and I wanted to make something artisanal with a contemporary touch.” But finding people with the skills needed has been tricky and, says Albaladejo, there is no government support to train more people, no craft associations to champion the cause. Yet despite all of this, Albaladejo retains some optimism: even if adding capacity is tricky, clients love her work and, like many of the people on these pages, she has also begun to find new customers through the use of social media (even though she has no personal accounts). She’s a woman who knows you can’t wait around for other people to solve your problems.

lapeceramallorca.com

1. Marlene Albaladejo, sporting fashion from Mallorca
2. ‘Robusta’ armchair
3. Side table with concrete top
4. ‘Gandula’ deckchair
5. ‘Robusta’ lounge chair in bulrush



1. Staff at Santa Maria del Camí
2. Guillermo and Maribel Bujosa
3. Loom
4. Yarns
5. Finished lengths of fabric
6. Not so digital



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Looming large *Bujosa, fabrics*

Clack, clack, clack. There's the confident sound of looms in action when you step into the noisy workshop of textile company Bujosa. On the walls hang order sheets and the tools needed to fine tune and fix the busy machinery. Bujosa has been in business since 1949 in the village of Santa María del Camí and, to get started when the factory was founded, they bought secondhand looms that are now a century old and still turning out bolts of desirable material. Talking to us over the mechanical din are the third generation of Bujosas, Maribel and her brother Guillermo, who takes care of production (along with his father, still at work every day at the age of 78). Bujosa fabrics are made from cotton, linen or silk, and are used for furnishings and fashion. "We have families who have been buying our linens and fabrics for generations," says Maribel. These include the typical Mallorquín *flàmules* (flame-like patterns) seen on cushions and even as wall coverings all over the island. The factory is from another era but Bujosa is in demand, shipping worldwide, and recently worked with designer Pablo Erroz for his Madrid fashion show. It's a methodical craft that's fit for our times.

bujosatextil.com



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Concrete strategy
Huguet, tiles and terrazzo

Biel Huguet has taken a stumbling concrete company and made it a global hit. Huguet was founded in 1933 by his grandfather, who ran a thriving business making the colourful floor tiles that were fashionable then. By the time Biel's father inherited the business in the 1970s it was a changed world and old crafts were being sidelined. Huguet turned to making breeze blocks and concrete beams. Then, in 1996, Biel's dad died suddenly. Biel had just graduated in technical architecture but, at 23, he found himself at the helm of a company in disarray. He started remaking floor tiles when he saw people moving to the island and restoring old houses. And he began to get noticed. "Sybilla, the most popular fashion designer at the time, proposed doing something contemporary with the tiles," he says. Since then he's worked with Herzog & de Meuron, Rem Koolhaas and Pentagram's designers, among others. And the phone keeps ringing. At the factory in the town of Campos, the yard is filled with orders waiting to be shipped; in the workshops men are handmaking tiles and buffing terrazzo sinks. What is his success down to? "I am open-minded and an entrepreneur – and I love being a tile-maker," says Biel.

huguetmallorca.com

1. Biel Huguet in the Campos showroom
2. Terrazzo samples
3. Pouring cement into the tile templates
4. Polishing terrazzo
5. The right way to make tiles



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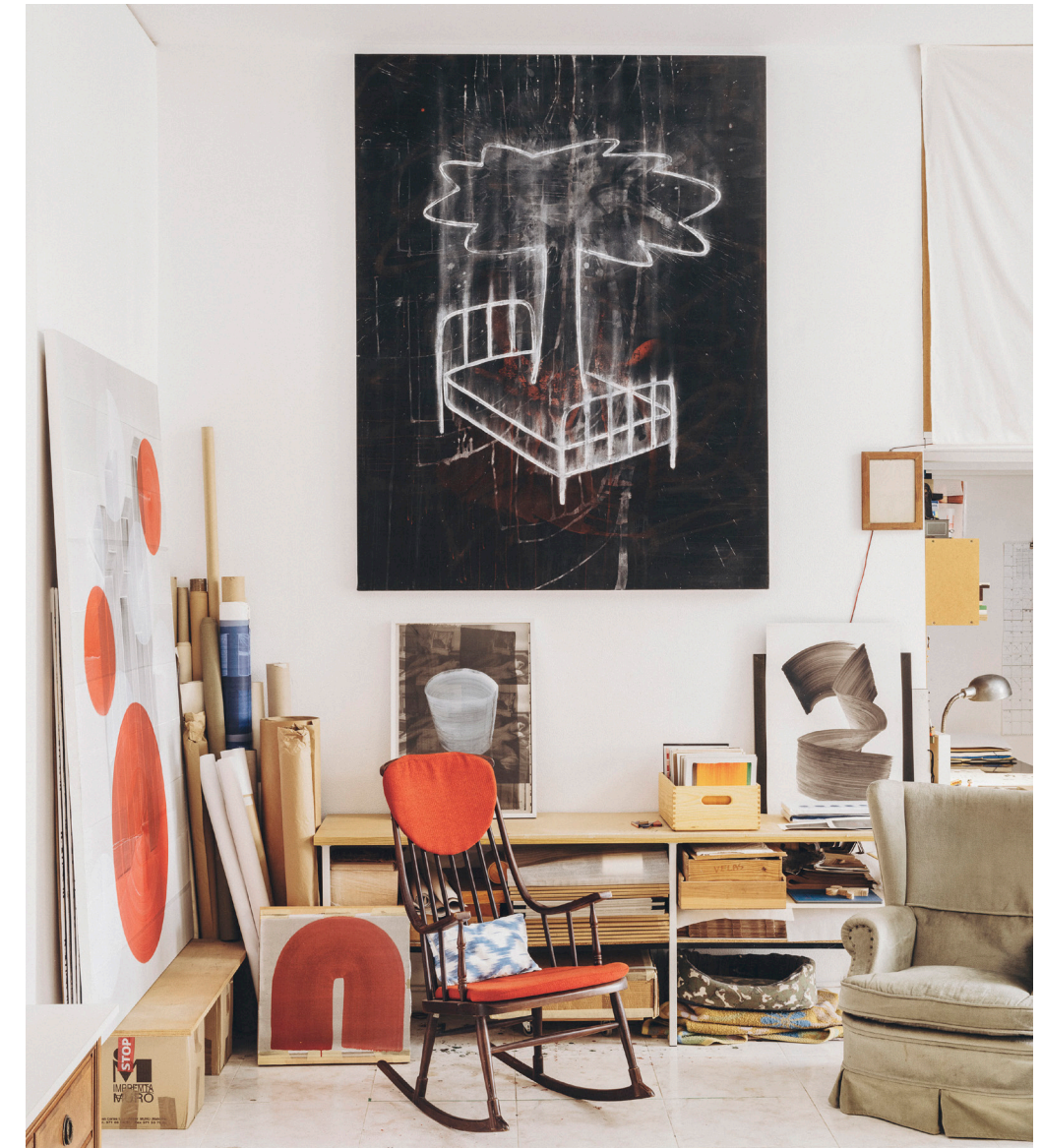
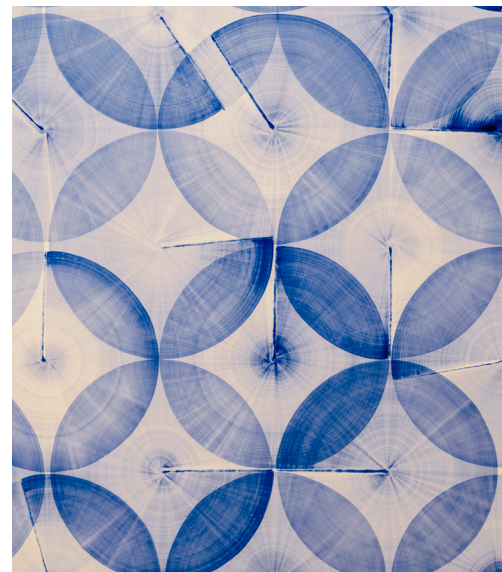


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1. Pedro Oliver
2. Framed print
3. Collection of prints
4. Geometry in harmony
5. Corner of Oliver's Palma studio



My life as a radical
Pedro Oliver, artist

Pedro Oliver opens the door to his studio in what looks like an average Palma apartment block. But step inside and you find a vast space filled with thousands of pieces of his meticulously stored art, neatly arranged tools and books. Oliver has spent much of his art life outside the world of fairs and dealers and he's not that fussed about selling to just anyone. This freedom has allowed him to paint (abstract, realistic, in colour and black and white), make prints, design books, work alone and in collectives, and explore the rave scene. Today he divides his time between his native Mallorca and Galicia. Now, after a hiatus, shows are coming to Porto and Palma. "I need to do shows just to make sure people don't think I have quit," he says, jokingly. While his work might look diverse at first, that archive shows how ideas are returned to, processes stripped back to their essence (his big brushstroke paintings a case in point). Oliver gives us a tour of his archive; his life as a radical. How is he so prolific? He starts work at 18.00 and paints through to 06.00, several days a week. "I love the silence of the night," he says. Oliver is among a long line of painters who have found space in Mallorca to explore big ideas.

pedrooliver.com