



Guatemalan FABRICS

Story by RICHARD NELSON

GUATEMALA WITH ITS INDIGENOUS Maya culture is one of a few places on earth where traditional crafts from ancient cultures survive. Weaving, one of the oldest of Maya crafts, was practiced centuries before the arrival of the Spanish. The majority of the women and some of the men of Guatemala still proudly wear their hand-woven traditional dress, or traje, whose intricate patterns identify them with a particular village.

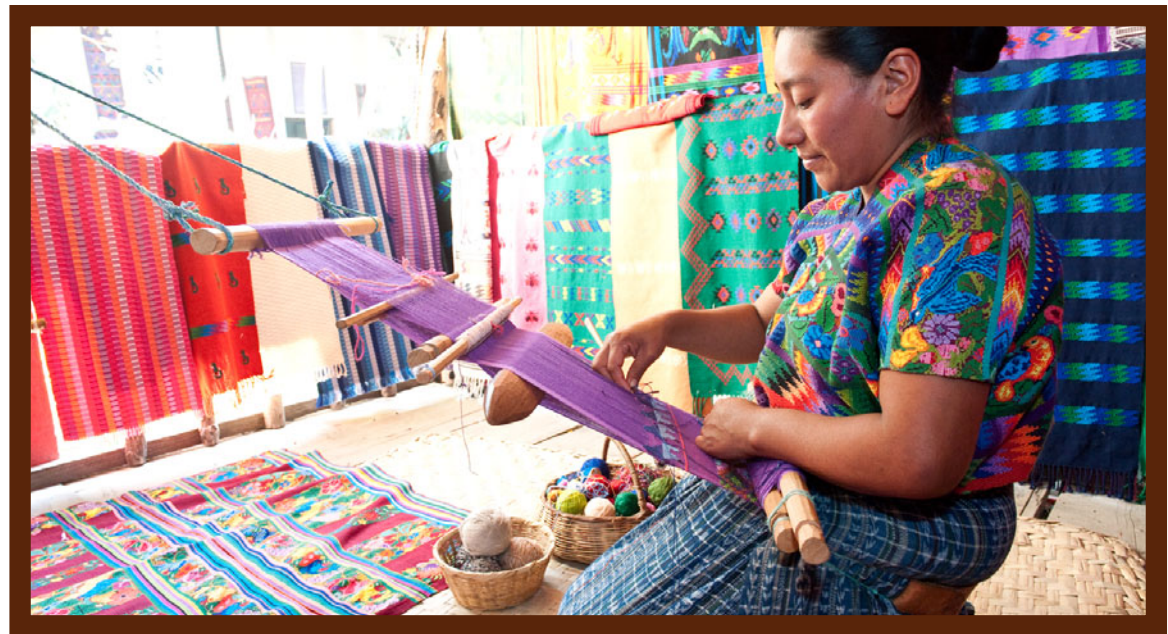
(Facing page) La Cabrera has over 20 different beef dishes on the menu. La Cabrera has over 20 different beef. (Above) La Cabrera has over 20 different beef dishes on.

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(Above) An impromptu casting lesson for a guest at the Ranch. Guides tie flies at night, getting ready for the next day's fishing. (Left) Another Collón Cura brown felled by a taste for rabbit-strip streamers.





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For the Maya, weaving serves both as a reminder of tradition and as a protest against pressures from the outside world. According to Maya legend, the goddess, Ixchel, invented weaving. Known as “she of the rainbow,” she also presided over childbirth, divination and healing and is often depicted at her loom. In an agricultural society of indigenous peoples such as Maya, designs of costumes and cloth are believed to have the power to protect one from supernatural harm. The sacred book on the Maya, the Popol Vul, forecasts that those who do not dress as their ancestors did, will be on the road to ruin.

From textile imprints found in burials, we know that weaving existed in Latin America 4,000 years ago. The weaving tools that have been found the graves indicate that the loom used in the beginning was exactly the loom used today—the back-strap loom—a simple

loom comprising two sticks or bars between which the warps are stretched. One bar is attached to a fixed object and the other to the weaver usually by means of a strap around the back of the weaver.

Like so much else in the Maya world, weaving is not simply a relic of the past but a living skill, responding to new ideas and recreated with each generation. Each weaver subtly adds her own artistic interpretation, creating textiles that reflect their rich cultural heritage and personal artistry.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Richard Nelson is a Minnesota photographer who has collected Maya fabrics since he first traveled to Guatemala in 1975. Currently he runs tours and art workshops in Guatemala through the group [Art Workshops In Guatemala](#), which is owned by Liza Fourre from Minneapolis.