

ture, this excellent book uses photography to document the shape and structure of Mexican peasants' homes. The materials used in these buildings are the ones that man has easy access to, and they are so close to Nature they seem to be part of the landscape, to blend into their background. Weathered by wind, rain and sunshine, many of these buildings seem to have been in their place forever.

The builders' tradition and experience determine the techniques that are used; the climate, available materials and usage dictate the form. These buildings have little to do with fashion and much to do with the essential aspects of life. Their dignity and poetic sense have been beautifully captured by Mariana Yampolsky's camera. This is a book to savour through the eyes.



**Arboles y arbustos útiles de México (Useful Trees and Shrubs of Mexico)**, by Aníbal Niembro Rojas. Limusa.

Mexico has one of the most contrasting and complex floras in the world because of its diverse climatic, edaphic, geologic and orographical conditions. There are some 20,000 species of vascular plants in the country, many of which are represented by a large number of trees and shrubs. Plants are an invaluable renewable natural resource because of the many products and benefits that can be obtained from them.

Unfortunately, many of Mexico's trees and shrubs are rapidly disappearing, often without having been studied in their role as part of their ecosystem nor in their medicinal or industrial potential usefulness.

*Useful Trees and Shrubs* takes a new look at the country's forests and gathers a considerable amount of information published over the last years on the main serviceable products derived from certain of the most common trees and shrubs in Mexico. The book is aimed at people who wish to broaden their knowledge of Mexican flora and to those interested in the conservation and rational use of plants.



**Peces, moluscos y crustáceos en los códices mexicanos (Fish, Molluscs and Crustacea in Mexican Codices)**, by Zita Basich. The National General Archive.

Zita Basich has put together an exhaustive collection of the aquatic fauna depicted in Mexican codex, revealing this specific aspect of the depth and beauty of pre-Colombian art. Molluscs, crustacea and fish are shown, many of which have commercial and food value and are proof of the wealth of the country's central-plateau lakes (the area in which Mexico City is located), its continental currents and extensive maritime areas on both coasts.

The wonderful technique used by the ancient *tlacuilos* (designers) makes it possible to identify many viviparous species such as sawfish, catfish, parrot fish and several kinds of leaping fish. The artist's morphological precision has the admirable beauty of conventional design. This material is a valuable addition to the study of ancient Mexico's fauna.



**Animales prehispánicos (Prehispanic Animals)**, by Sonia Lombardo de Ruiz. National General Archive.

The wealth of forms in pre-Colombian culture is one of the most important legacies handed down to us by the Mesoamerican peoples. Their iconographic and hieroglyphic representations contain an enormous variety of motifs that can be used in an updated context to support original and genuinely national designs. This is possible because of their peculiar formal categories.

The material brought together in this book was taken from ceramics, painting, sculpture and architecture. The criteria used in selecting the material was strictly thematic, and it is presented in groupings of analogous motifs, combining the styles of different cultures, regions and time-periods.

The images include forms that can be considered naturalistic, others in which the combination of different species' characteristics produces "fantastic animals", and still others in which symbolic forms are only remotely associated with reality. This later type of image is particularly interesting because the level of abstraction and schematization of the designs; especially the glyphs, is considered modern today. In these designs, animal forms are presented in their transition from pictographic to ideographic glyphs. ☆

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## Books Worth Reading

**La casa que canta (The House that Sings)**, by Mariana Yampolsky. Ministry of Public Education.

A narrative and pictorial testimony of popular Mexican architec-