

TALENT



Zebre de Burchell, a hand-painted print on cotton velvet.

Pensée Masai, a cotton blend.



Daman des Roches, a mohair blend.

## WEAVING A SPELL

In her latest collection, the artistic director of French fabric house Casamance achieves a new level of tactile luxury



Florence Vermelle



Empreinte Swahili wallpaper.

Fabric designers tend to be a passionate bunch, and Florence Vermelle is no exception. The artistic director of the luxury-textile company Casamance, based in Lille, France, talks about silks and wools with an almost rhapsodic fervor. "A textile conveys emotion," says the chic 47-year-old Frenchwoman. "When you enter a room and see a curtain or a cushion, you immediately get a feeling inside. And then when you touch it?" Dramatic pause. "You have another emotion!"

Since cofounding Casamance 16 years ago, Vermelle has quietly built a strong reputation for the firm in Europe, where her fabrics are known for their high quality and nuanced palette. But recently the designer has taken her love of velvety jacquards, metallic sheers, and glimmering satins to an even more transcendent level. Her new line of textiles, Misia, is Casamance's couture-level entry into the marketplace. "It's a

collection that is very intimate and very exclusive," she says. "It has a personal point of view."

The point of view, of course, is her own. With Misia, Vermelle has been given artistic license to create freely, with less regard for commercial considerations. Art Deco designs are a signature of the line, but the designer's wide-ranging touchstones also include Masai garments, exotic animals, and the abstractions of Robert and Sonia Delaunay. Among the offerings are sensuous cotton velvets; dry, deconstructed linens; and one-of-a-kind wovens like *dégradé*-striped Suri-alpaca wool, all in Vermelle's extraordinarily calibrated palette. "There are colors you just don't see elsewhere," says Winter Park, Florida-based designer Marc Thee, an early fan. "Instead of the usual creams and beiges, you get colors like flax, wheat, oatmeal, and pumice. Instead of browns and grays, it's minks and grayish lavenders, with all the nuances in between."

The line is named after the legendary Misia Sert, the thrice-married pianist who served as a muse to some of Europe's greatest artists during the Belle Epoque and Roaring Twenties: Bonnard, Renoir, Vuillard, and Toulouse-Lautrec all painted portraits of the vivacious patron of the arts, who was nicknamed "the Queen of Paris." Misia has obviously become a muse for Vermelle as well. "I'm not a nostalgic person, but I wanted to capture the glamour, audacity, and freedom of that period," she says. "Misia lived her life without compromise. I admire that." **CATHERINE HONG**



Enlacez-Moi, a cotton-silk jacquard.

Swing Swing, a cotton blend.



Cayo Hueso, a cotton-linen blend.