

Textile Travels: Part IV
Mexico City and Oaxaca

G W E N B L A K L E Y K I N S L E R



The author's huipil collection.
All photographs by the author.

Part 4 of our online travel series includes Gwen's favorite shopping spots in Mexico City. In Part 1, Gwen told how she began her textile collection with treasures bought in Honduras and Guatemala; Parts 2 and 3 are accounts of her stay in Ecuador (to access Parts 1, 2, and 3, click on Free Projects & Articles, then on Articles). Stay tuned for future installments. All of the countries visited in the series continue to draw textile lovers.



Jacket purchased at Ciudadela Market, Mexico City. Woven, embroidered, appliqué. Collection of the author.



Detail of huipil with “doll” embroidery. Woven, embroidered. Oaxaca. Collection of the author.

LIVING with my family for two years in Mexico City awakened me to the extraordinary beauty of Mexican culture. Examples of Mexican folk art abound in the many markets, museums, and shops in

this city, and it was here that I met Barbara Hopkins, Ruth Lechuga, and Marjorie Jackson, three women who have made significant contributions in documenting Mexican folk art traditions.

I still have my voluminous notes from Barbara Hopkins’s lecture “Indigenous Cultures and Their Art.” A graduate of Vassar College, Hopkins spent more than twenty years studying and collecting folk art from more than fifty indigenous groups. During a private tour of Ruth Lechuga’s extensive collection of folk art in her eighteen-room apartment, her passion for the pieces, meticulously cataloged, that she had assembled over six decades was evident. A political refugee who came to Mexico from Nazi Austria in 1939, Lechuga maintained a lifelong curiosity about Mexican culture and never purchased a piece of folk art without first meeting its maker. She died in 2004, bequeathing the apartment and its contents to the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City (Hidalgo 45, Centro Historico, Mexico DF 06300; 52 5518 2266; www.franzmayer.org.mx). Marjorie Jackson, who lived and worked in Mexico City for more than thirty years, inherited a marvelous collection of indigenous garments. I greatly appreciate her willingness to show it to me, and we still keep in touch when Marjorie comes to Chicago to visit her son.

Although Mexico City provides a great overview of folk art from every state of Mexico, there is nothing like seeing it firsthand. Oaxaca, Mexico’s fifth-largest state, is home to more than 200 important archaeological sites; nearly 100 native dialects are spoken there. It also is *the* place to purchase a huipil, a blouse worn by indigenous woman in many parts of Mexico and Central America that is essentially a woven rectangle that is doubled and sewn up the side with an opening for the arms and head. Carla Fernandez, a Mexican clothing designer who uses indigenous designs as her inspiration, says, “Of all the garments of pre-Hispanic origin worn by women, the huipil is the one whose use is most widespread.” Of the several huipiles that I own, the example shown above from Oaxaca is special because of its unusual “doll” embroidery. Memorable textile markets in Oaxaca are in Oaxaca City, Santo

Tomás Jalieza, San Antonino Castillo Velasco, Tlaxiaco, Tuxtepec, and Huautla de Jiménez (the last three are well known for their huipiles).

My favorite markets in Mexico City include the following:

- ✘ Ciudadela Market on Balderas Avenue—My constant source of beautiful silver jewelry from Taxco; you can also find wool wraps, blankets, embroidered dresses, and sombreros.
- ✘ Insurgentes Market in the Pink Zone (Zona Rosa)—Greeted by enthusiastic vendors, you will find every corner crammed with colorful souvenirs along with high-quality textiles.
- ✘ Bazar del Sábado in the San Angel neighborhood—This most picturesque of markets operates only on Saturdays; expect to pay more for original objects that often blur the distinction between craft and art.
- ✘ Casa Victor, 10 Madero Avenue—This hidden gem is housed in a nondescript office building up two flights of steep stairs; it’s owned by Victor Fosado, an artist and leading authority on Mexican handcrafts, all manner of which, including clothing, are for sale here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR. *Gwen Blakley Kinsler, founder of the Crochet Guild of America, is an author, teacher, and designer. She lives in Rolling Meadows, Illinois. Visit her website at www.crochetqueen.com.*

FURTHER READING

- Fernandez, Carla. *Taller Flora*. Mexico City: Editorial Diamantina, 2006. (Available in Spanish with an English translation online at www.flora2.com.)
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- Meilach, Dona, and Dee Menagh. *Exotic Needlework with Ethnic Patterns, Techniques, Inspirations*. New York: Crown, 1988. Out of print.
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The author modeling at a British/American Newcomers’ Club fashion show featuring Mexican costumes.