

SPIRIT

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Designer Yasmine Saleh Ghoniem infuses spaces with elements inspired by Middle Eastern style, as this laid-back family home in Australia demonstrates





Above, from left: an African leopard mask from Appetite for Decoration, a vintage West German vase and a flower mirror from Sunroom Glass brighten the hallway. The rattan and ceramic cabinet is a 1950s piece; designer Yasmine Saleh Ghoniem



Yasmine Saleh Ghoniem's background is marked by cultural richness: her Egyptian father and Australian mother met in Libya, and raised her between Kuwait City, Riyadh and Sydney. She spent her first year of college at the American University in Dubai before transferring to the United States for the remainder of her studies. After receiving her degree, she remained in the U.S. for three years before setting off to travel the world. Ghoniem also volunteered as an aid worker, living in a Maasai *manyatta* hut during a stint assisting with the building of schools in Kenya. Next, a year-long globetrot took her to Sri Lanka, Spain, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

"I came back to Sydney in my late 20s and have been here ever since," says Ghoniem. "I head back to the Middle East quite regularly to check on several projects we're working on there, and to visit my father in Egypt. It's where my inspiration comes from: the beautiful, richly layered buildings, the bold colours and patterned fabrics found in the markets, and the soulful trips down the Nile, where

sunsets and night skies engulf you. I bring it all home with me."

Working at the helm of a solo practice, YSG, since 2020 (after having co-founded Amber Road Studio with her sister, the landscape architect Katy Svalbe, in 2013), Ghoniem looks back to her youth in the Middle East to inform her creative approach. "I'm all for age-old crafts that demonstrate the human touch, from fabric dyeing to rug weaving and wood carving," she says. "So many of my interiors include bespoke design elements." This house in Byron Bay, on the northern coast of New South Wales, Australia, is a great example of that.

Ghoniem's team was approached to radically revamp the 1990s exposed-brick residence for a young family. Throughout the redesign, YSG introduced a sensuous mix of Italian vintage pieces from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, giving some a sassy glow-up. Chrome dining chairs were revived with shimmering citron upholstery; cone-shaped bar stools are now dressed in a Kvadrat silk jacquard, its weave depicting exotic fronds; and a pair of

In the bar area, the checked armchairs are vintage pieces, as are the chrome Arteluce wall light, chrome sphere and side table. The floor is clad in terracotta tiles from Artedomus in a custom design by YSG, which also designed the circular window

Previous pages: the open-plan dining and living area features zebrano joinery, a Moon pendant by YSG and a bold Elitis wallpaper. The reclaimed wood dining table is also by YSG, and the vintage dining chairs have been covered in Kelly Wearstler fabric





The kitchen has marble worktops and a blind in striped Dedar fabric. The high-back chair is by Sergio Rodrigues. Opposite page: a denim Soriana armchair by Cassina in the sunken lounge. Ceramic coffee table by Studio ALM






armchairs is resplendent in mint-and-chocolate harlequin-check wool.

“In response to requests for breakout areas and generous entertaining zones within the sprawling living area, we constructed an angled wall to cosy up a neglected rectangular space,” says Ghoniem. “We also enhanced the lounge to reflect our clients’ love of deep brown, setting it down a few steps to create a 1970s-inspired sunken zone.”

Throughout the home, the designer added jolts of indigo and denim blue, as well as watermelon pink and green stripes. “Natural colours are something the studio always uses to reference the desertscapes from my childhood,” says Ghoniem. “The striped joinery details at the base of the kitchen island recall striped mosque façades.”

The home’s breezeways and semi-private enclosures are also reminiscent of the Middle East. Innovative timber framing and slatted privacy devices echoing Egyptian *mashrabiya* screens have become signature YSG details. In this

project, a fixed screen conceals the utility room, yet maintains connections to the task areas and floating kitchen island. Upstairs, latticed timber filters light into a newly enclosed corridor, adding visual interest from below. “It creates a secret passage for the children, as their bedroom is located behind it,” explains Ghoniem, who also introduced vertical timber battens to a slatted ceiling on the upper balcony, adding shade to a lounge that the parents use. “I’m more concerned about the way interiors feel than the way they look,” she asserts. “Even when I design waterside houses, my focus is always internal, so the view becomes a bonus.”

Currently working on a 3,000-square-metre private residence in Saudi Arabia, Ghoniem is also collaborating with a Khaleeji architect to create “an Arab oasis” in a Dubai home. She continues to explore her roots in more subtle ways, too: “My heritage certainly plays a part in my colour and textural choices, and surface finishes are always highly considered. Touch plays a major role in connecting people to moments.”  ysg.studio

Above, from left: the tub in the principal bathroom is covered in travertine mosaics. Hand-painted ewer by Softedge Studio; a red raku table by Lisa Lapointe in the principal bedroom. Opposite page: vintage planters and a Tecta lounge on the sun deck