

Culture Clash

In Melbourne's Fitzroy North, YSG Studio effortlessly mixes Danish minimalism with Middle Eastern charm.



In the heart of Melbourne's Fitzroy North, a classic Victorian weatherboard home has undergone a bold transformation that marries Danish minimalism with Middle Eastern influences.

Designed by YSG Studio, the Mo Jacobsen project reflects the personalities of its Egyptian-Australian and Danish owners. As Yasmine Ghoniem, Director of YSG Studio, explains, the home is a "match made in hygge heaven, albeit with exotic beats."

Hygge is a Scandi concept all about embracing cosiness, comfort, and a sense of contentment in everyday moments. It's found in life's simple pleasures—soft lighting, inviting textures, and shared moments with loved ones. Stepping into the warm, sunlit surroundings of the Mo Jacobsen property, this feeling is instantly brought to life.

The renovation took the residence down to its bare bones, with the original structure serving as a foundation for the punchy new architectural choices. Two-thirds of the home now features a light-filled extension where sculpted volumes and meticulously considered details create intimacy and expansiveness.

"Our extension is the first project to be completed by YSG's in-house architectural team," says Yasmine.

One of the most important briefing notes from the clients was that they wanted to build sustainably. Despite its rarity in Australia, hempcrete was chosen for its excellent thermal insulation. Paired with natural lime wash finishes, it allows the home to breathe while maintaining a timeless look and feel.

The home's spatial layout is equally impressive. A peach-toned corridor paved with terracotta-hued tiles serves as a bridge between the old and new sections of the house. It accommodates a laundry, powder room, and main bathroom, while a progression of vitrified

porcelain tiles inspired by Persian rugs creates a visual journey that extends into the outdoor courtyard.

Spatial illusion was another compelling tactic, with YSG cleverly maximising the sense of openness without expanding the home's original extension boundaries. Ceiling heights were maintained from the original structure but enhanced by large windows, sliding doors, and clerestory openings that bathe the home in natural light.

Strategically placed coloured glass ribbons align sightlines between the breakfast nook, summer lounge, and main suite, blurring the boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces.

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— Yasmine Ghoniem

For Yasmine, the magic of the home comes from seamlessly combining the clients' unique tastes and cultures. "He is Danish, with an appreciation for pale timber, clean finishes, and minimal ornamentation. She is Egyptian-Australian, with a love of pattern, tactility, and colour," she says.

This dichotomy is expressed in the property's intricate joinery, crafted from light Queensland maple, and the gorgeous stone finishes in the kitchen and bathrooms. A turquoise granite kitchen island, floating marble basins, and hammam-inspired curves in the bathroom design all nod to the clients' cultural roots.

As for the colour palette, it was a unique challenge since both clients are colour-blind. "We opted for muted tones with a neutral, washed-out feel, but we amplified tonal intensities—something we could do confidently thanks to their trust," Yasmine shares.

The weatherboard façade keeps its heritage charm but is refreshed with a warm, creamy tone. Inside, apricot doors and jewel-toned glass panels set a welcoming tone, while garnet-hued tiles ground the living spaces.

The furnishings reflect the two distinct cultures. Scandi classics, such as Jacobsen dining chairs and a Saarinen Womb chair, are complemented by richly textured Middle Eastern-inspired fabrics and rugs. Lighting fixtures range from a vintage Louis Poulsen pendant in the breakfast nook to an interesting Apparatus sconce leading into the main suite.

"Our bowerbird client brought a sense of adventure to the home, layering it with meaningful, experiential investments. They visited Egypt before purchasing the dining table we specified and Copenhagen to source the teal light that now hangs above it," the YSG director notes.

The Mo Jacobsen project is ultimately a deeply personal space. It is a home that celebrates heritage, embraces innovation, and offers a sanctuary filled with light, warmth, and character.

As Yasmine eloquently concludes, the design is a testament to the beauty that emerges when two distinct design sensibilities meet and evolve together.

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