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YASMINE GHONIEM

The designer behind new retreat Moon Gang, nestled in nature above Bali's Ubud, talks on her maverick design ethos – and why a touch of hedonism can be good for you.

Both the architecture and design of Moon Gang were created by your Sydney-based YSG Studio – the *Vogue Living* Interior Designer of the Year in 2025, no less – and your unique style has been described as both 'artisan' and 'anarchic'. How do you bridge the two? I guess the conduit would be another 'A' word: authenticity. I'm always asking myself, "am I designing the very best, instinctually genuine work I can?" My practice is all about mood activation. I want people to feel what they see; something they've never encountered before.

Born to an Egyptian father and Australian mother, you had a nomadic childhood living between Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Sydney. How are your projects influenced by this? It's instilled in me a more open, global approach to conversations, points of view and my aesthetic appreciation.

Moon Gang is directed at creatives – particularly music, wellness and design lovers. How did you intersect these different 'loves'? To answer this, I'll need to introduce the owner/operator Kirsten Millbank and her creative consultant, Tory Bauer. They had already conceived many of the hotel's offerings. So, the design enhances the experiences. For example, we created an exposed upper deck above the spa for yoga, guided meditation and ritual movement, and the lounge's U-shaped seating configuration encourages socialisation near the record player (1).

The DIY DJ station is fun. How did that idea come about? It came from a simple belief: music is best explored and shared, not just streamed. It stems from Kirsten's feverish obsession with Indonesian music and culture. A hypnotic blend of rare groove and steamy disco found in long-lost Indonesian city pop. Records line shelves that are sourced from Japan, China and Indonesia.

We're fascinated by the 'plant orchestra'. Could you explain? It's a cool, site-specific innovation by Bottlesmoker, an Indonesian dance/electro duo. Their programmed system uses sensors to read plants' tiny electrical fluctuations, translating them into live, ever-changing musical notes. Connected to speakers, the soundscape forms a hypnotic backdrop beat in the main lounge area where potted plants sit on shelves, and among the rooftop deck's wall of greenery. The notes become a sound bath for meditation, movement and yoga.

With just five suites and guest numbers capped at 10, is privacy part of the appeal of Moon Gang? Absolutely, it's really like staying in someone's private holiday home where you get to meet their cool friends – aka other guests. Personally, I'm looking forward to booking it out and taking my closest friends, which you can also do.

As a frequent traveller, what do you pack in your carry-on? Alémais swimmers, no matter what time of year; an interiors magazine, ideally a European or Middle Eastern *Architectural Digest*; and Dior's Oud Ispahan – its scent reminds me of my childhood [in the Middle East].

What's the best souvenir you've ever taken home from your travels? A weaving I bought in Cairo while visiting my dad. It depicts life by the Nile and sits above my desk at work so I can dip in daily.

Moon Gang's appeal is for those who wish to party (silent discos are on offer), have a health reboot, admire design or laze by the pool (2). Do you think this balance could be the future of hospitality? The older I get, the more I want to tap into hedonistic pleasures on holiday. Ones that recharge rather than exhaust me. Here, you can indulge in healthy and insightful activities, plus beneficial treatments, then amp it up with a cocktail in one hand and vinyl in the other when the sun sets. It flicks a switch inside of you to let go and be open to new experiences. **IT**

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