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HAYDEN COX REVOLUTIONISED SURFBOARDS. NOW HE IS RIDING A NEW DESIGN WAVE

BY
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OTHER PASSIONS

YASMINE GHONIEM

Founder, co-director of interior design studio YSG
Age: 40 Lives: Sydney

“Lessons are like a recharge button. I arrive solo, dance solo and get into my groove.”



Words by Philippa Coates Photograph by Renee Nowytargeter

You grew up in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. How did that influence your life now as founder of your own interior design studio?

I attended international schools and consider my upbringing to have been rather liberating because of all the exposure I had to different cultures, religions and values. I danced since I was four and was in and out of various bands for years. I started a band with a school girlfriend whose penthouse I'm currently designing in Kuwait. My father was keen for me to pursue a career that would secure financial stability.

In Sydney, you were singer-songwriter in a band called The Conversations for seven years. How did the switch to Latin dancing come up?

In our 30s everyone was having babies and it became hard to keep the band together. I didn't know much about Latin dancing until I joined Latin Dance Australia about a year ago, and it has truly changed my everyday. I started taking random classes in bachata, Brazilian salsa and samba, and fell

in love with samba. I've been having private lessons and just got admitted into the MV Samba Elite Team.

Congratulations! That sounds prestigious.

It's really a passport to performing. Hard work, practice and dedication will get you there. Prestigious – maybe not. Flipping awesome – hell yes!

Describe the samba outfit and how long is a typical dance?

Lots of sequins, strappy gold heels and feather headsets; think peacock vibes. My teacher, Debralee Scarselletta, is a three-times world champion; she designs and makes all the costumes herself. Performance length is three to four minutes tops, but the exertion to pull off the three to four minutes is huge. It's kind of like the whole human-versus-dog-year thing.

You're wearing Doc Martens today. I'm guessing you're not a regular high-heels wearer?

No, so it's pretty intense. Heels change the way you move. My first performance is in

September, so I've got some time to practise.

What about managing the wardrobe?

It's tricky because of your headpiece.

Imagine placing something on your head and it staying quiet, then just letting everything below the neck go wild.

It sounds quite different to your ballet training.

It was quite frustrating in fact, because ballet's very strict and rigid and samba is totally the opposite. You have to retrain and rethink how you use your body.

Do you have a dance partner?

I was doing partner work but I just wanted to dance and not have to think about another person. Samba lets you do that. Lessons are like a recharge button. I arrive solo, dance solo and get into my groove.

You're planning to launch your own furniture line at the end of the year – impressive given YSG is only eight years old.

We're working on a couple of different pieces that can sit together, that hark from my heritage, and provide some space-saving.

I love clever design. It's got to be really functional but it's amazing if it looks good too. And it will be made in Australia.

Describe your design style and your approach.

My end goal is always about evoking feelings rather than a fixed visual conclusion, so spending time on my own in a space prior to any presentation to a client is fundamental. I guess I'm a choreographer of sorts because space occupies my mind as much as furnishings and fixtures. I think about movement within it – areas to pause, key access points, heavy traffic areas and journeys from one zone to another.

Are you nervous about being on stage soon?

We're on stage every day, aren't we? Whether it's presenting a concept to a client, singing to a crowd, or performing a three-minute routine to strangers, it's all about connectivity to the human spirit. I give my all to everything I do. But I can live off a performance high for days, there's nothing quite like it. ●