

YSG Studio

IN PROFILE

Eclectic and versatile, the work of YSG Studio rebuffs architectural minimalism and conventional design “rules” to revive our sensorial perception and amplify the emotive potential of residential design.

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Photography by Prue Ruscoe

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It's hard not to be excited by YSG Studio. The practice's work is like a great song that makes you want to turn up the volume and listen to it on repeat. Fed up with the bare white walls and grey concrete floors that define so much of Australian residential design, YSG Studio aims to revive our sensorial perception with colours, compositions, textures and stories – and people are hungry for it.

YSG Studio was established in 2020 by Yasmine Saleh Ghoniem. Despite a clear passion for performing, having been singing and dancing since the age of four, Yasmine was convinced by her parents to pursue academic study. She first studied visual communications in Dubai and then fine arts and interiors in the USA. Subsequently Yasmine worked in several architectural firms, finding herself gravitating toward architectural illustration and the hand-drawn aspects of the design process. Leaving the USA, she undertook a year of international aid work before returning to Australia and focusing on hospitality and residential projects. Together with her sister, landscape architect Katy Svalbe, she co-founded Amber Road in 2013, a multidisciplinary design firm that worked across all scales from landscape through to interiors. Yasmine says that the seven years of Amber Road were valuable in allowing

her to work on larger-scale projects and across all design typologies, and that the experience has ensured that YSG Studio is “flexible about the realities of the day-to-day.” In 2020, Katy returned to Perth, and Yasmine decided it was the right time to launch her own eponymous studio with a focus on architecture, interiors, furnishings and experience design.

Notions of identity and belonging as experienced by many multicultural Australians figure in the rationale of her practice. As the daughter of an Egyptian father and Australian mother, Yasmine lived a nomadic childhood and says, “I’ve never felt at home ... being an outsider has felt natural”. She wants YSG to “carve out a niche ... to think outside the box and not follow trends” and credits YSG’s success to the work’s distinctiveness, stating that “clients chose to work with me because they want something different and I’m different!” Within the context of Australian design, this means rebuffing the architectural minimalism that is the dominant paradigm of residential interiors. YSG embraces a “global aesthetic” that celebrates “romanticism and eclecticism” and creates homes that, according to Yasmine, are “animated and passionate” with a strong connection to client.

YSG likes to collaborate closely with clients. In Polychrome House (as Amber Road, 2018), the design



Polychrome House first floor 1:400

- 1 Garage
- 2 Guest bedroom
- 3 Lounge
- 4 Dining
- 5 Bar
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Main bedroom
- 8 Linen
- 9 Guest bedroom/office
- 10 Existing roof



Polychrome House ground floor 1:400



01 Yasmine Saleh Ghoniem believes that clients approach YSG Studio in search of something different. Artwork: Nick Santoro.

02 In Polychrome House (2018), a fearless use of colour reflects the client's commitment to joyful living.

03 The expressive colour and material scheme, developed with Lymesmith, complements the original 1960s house. Mural: Lymesmith.

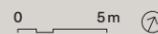
was developed to allow the client to self-build many of the elements, such as the flooring. In Crane in the Sky Apartment (2020), the client's keen interest in art and fabrics meant that the interior had to allow for the integration and display of these elements. YSG was not afraid to "reassess the fundamentals," incorporating an element of scenic art in the main bedroom ceiling. Yasmine sees that creating "emotive drama in a space" is an essential feature of good design.

The small-scale 1906 Apartment (as Amber Road, 2018; see *Houses: Kitchens and Bathrooms* 14) is a showcase of the studio's inventive approach to design. The brief was to replan a one-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment to accommodate an additional bedroom and bathroom. To perform this feat of magic, the conventional ideas of what defines bedrooms and bathrooms needed to be questioned. Instead of walls, joinery and sliding screens delineate spaces. Yasmine drew on her Egyptian heritage, referencing the *mashrabiya* screens that filter light from the outside while preserving visual privacy on the inside. She notes that Australian light and climate have much more in common with those of the Mediterranean than with those of Scandinavia, and as such YSG's designs pay close attention

- | | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1 Lounge | 6 Robe |
| 2 Dining | 7 Main bedroom |
| 3 Kitchen | 8 Office |
| 4 Balcony | 9 Guest bedroom |
| 5 Laundry | 10 Linen |



Crane in the Sky floor plan 1:400



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04 In Crane in the Sky Apartment (2020), walls were removed to maximize spatial flow and usher in natural light. Artwork: Ken Done.

05 Careful attention has been paid to window treatments and light control at 1906 Apartment (2018). Photograph: Felix Forest.

06 Timber screens function as moveable walls in the apartment, allowing the living room to convert to a guest bedroom. Photograph: Felix Forest.



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to window treatments and light control. Of the apartment's dark colour palette, Yasmine says, "[T]his isn't bold ... we should consider black as the inverse of white."

Yasmine has worked across numerous design typologies while practising as Amber Road and as YSG, finding that many commercial clients come back to her when it is time to design their homes. The owners of the Dream Weaver Apartment (2020) are also returning clients, having previously worked with Yasmine on the design of their family home. In the apartment, they sought a home that would reflect the way they wanted to live as empty nesters, and they knew that YSG could realize this for them. The existing interior was typical of Sydney speculative development: white walls and ceilings. The first tactic YSG deployed was to add warmth in colour and texture in surface. The floors were tiled in limestone and the main wall in the living space clad in handmade Moroccan tiles. Deep plum, iris and magenta were used as strong contrasts. The result transports us a few degrees south in latitude, from crisp white Scandinavia to the warm Mediterranean. The strong, grid-like geometry that governed the design of the existing apartment was used a motif for the detail in YSG's redesign. Squares within squares at different scales create a dialogue between the elements, some flat, some textured and some shiny. As in the 1906 Apartment, the apartment reveals YSG's fascination with interiors that both perform and transform. A granite lazy Susan swivels out for use at the kitchen bench, while

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Entry | 7 Guest bedroom |
| 2 Informal lounge | 8 Laundry |
| 3 Balcony | 9 Office |
| 4 Lounge | 10 Robe |
| 5 Dining | 11 Main bedroom |
| 6 Kitchen | |

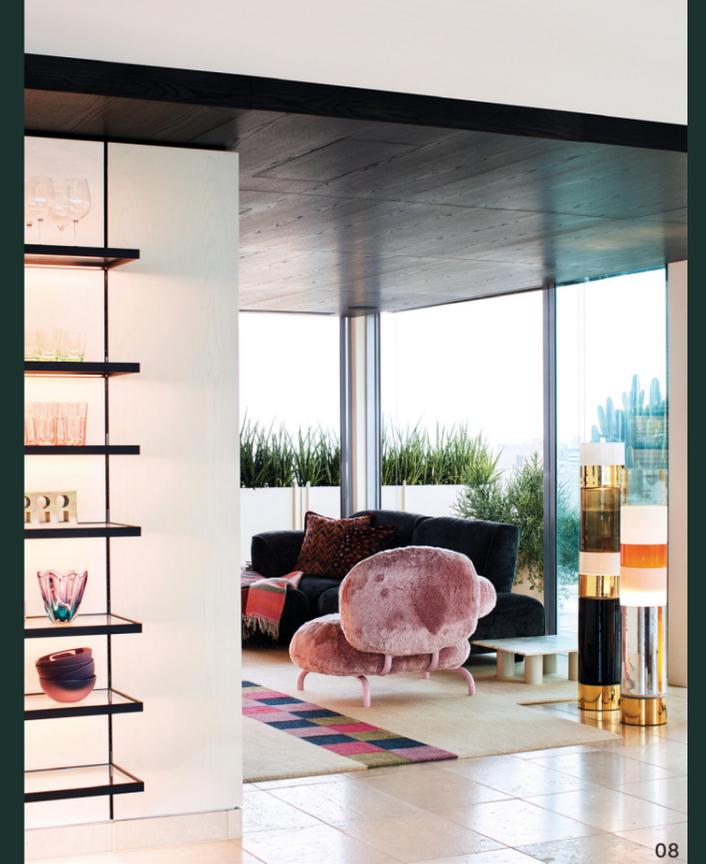


Dream Weaver floor plan 1:400 0 5m ↑

07 The studio delights in custom touches, including the leg detail on the Dream Weaver dining table, designed with Adam Goodrum.

08 For Dream Weaver Apartment (2020), YSG transformed a typical speculative development into a playful home.

09 Colour and texture counterbalance the crisp architectural shell and demarcate zones in the open-plan living area. Painting: Cannon Dill. Sculpture (behind vase): William Versace.



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10 A heritage-listed sandstone corner store is converted into a family home in Soft Serve (2021).

11 New additions enhance the original walls, engaging in a “robust” dialogue with history.

12 YSG’s interiors are vibrant, eclectic, open and versatile. Artworks (L–R): Lauren Kerjan, Rune Christensen.

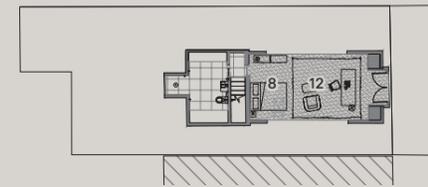


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a custom-designed drinks trolley is wheeled around as required, tapping into the clients’ love of all things playful. One of the things that pleases Yasmine the most about Dream Weaver Apartment is that a friend of the clients stated that YSG had captured their essence and “designed their personality.”

The finished result of Soft Serve (2021) may look effortless, but this appearance belies the complexity involved in re-imagining the heritage-listed three-storey building. The sandstone structure was suffering from an unsympathetic and unworkable 90s renovation, and YSG had to find a way of making it a home. Firstly, the ground-floor living spaces were rationalized by creating a unified floor level that ties the kitchen, dining and outdoor areas together. Yasmine explains that YSG believes in a “robust” dialogue with history in order to achieve a workable outcome. This approach ensured that the most important aspects of the heritage building were respected and highlighted in the new design while still allowing for a contemporary mode of living.

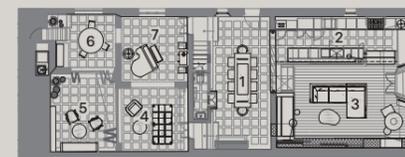
YSG Studio’s aims to “set a mood rather than an aesthetic” is translated into interiors of vibrancy, eclecticism, openness and versatility. The identities of designer and client are melded to create an unashamedly expressive approach to residential design that is unbound by conventional design “rules”. In a society that often talks of celebrating diversity and difference, it’s so refreshing to see a design practice that embodies this positive energy and isn’t afraid to dance to the beat of its own drum. © *ysg.studio*



Soft Serve second floor 1:400



Soft Serve first floor 1:400



Soft Serve ground floor 1:400



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- 1 Dining
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Lounge
- 4 Salon
- 5 Outdoor entertaining
- 6 Study
- 7 Music room
- 8 Guest bedroom
- 9 Robe
- 10 Main bedroom
- 11 Library
- 12 Office