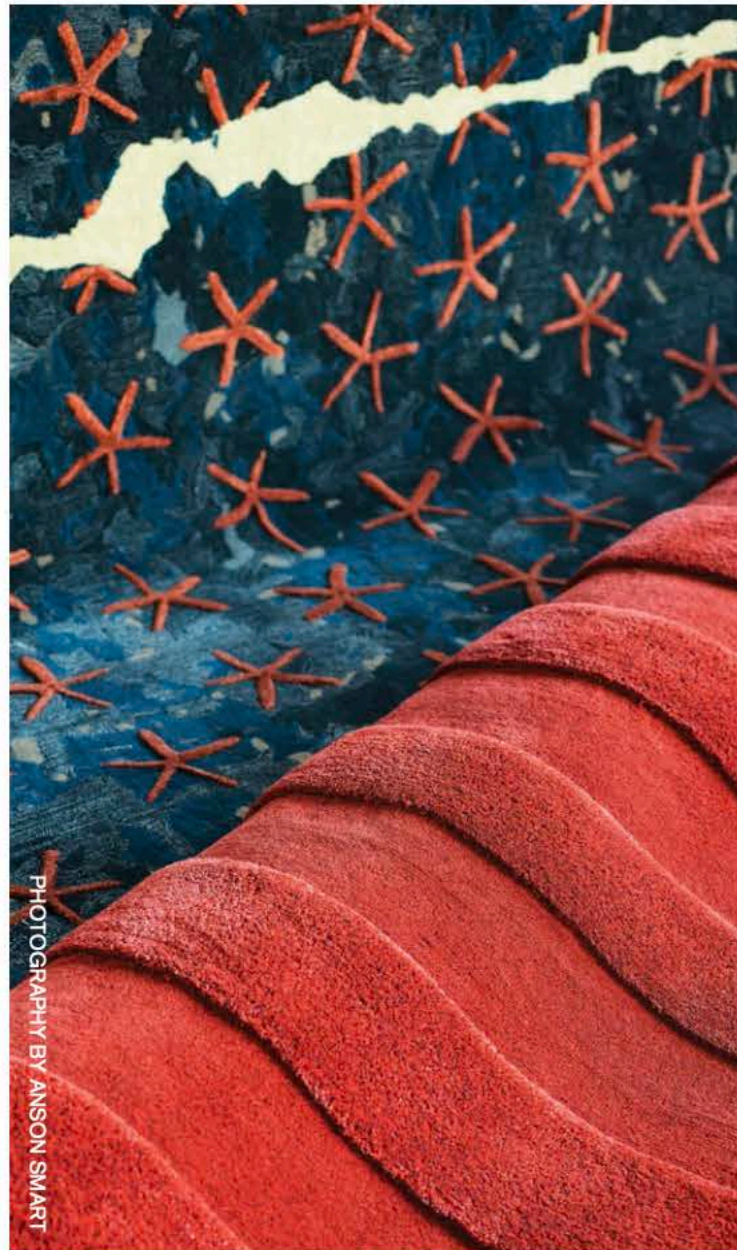


## Q&A: Yasmine Ghoneim

*The architect, founder and director of her self-named practice YSG, and recently appointed host of Grand Designs Australia, talks to The Everywoman about her work, her family's continuing influence, and her past life as a rock star.*



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What was the journey like to starting YSG, your architecture practice? Was there one epiphany moment that made you want to start something by yourself?

I think it was a natural progression. The idea of setting up my own studio has always thrilled me as I've always seen myself as a sort of solo operator – there wasn't ever any fear in taking the next step. Since YSG launched in 2020, staff numbers have grown to over 15, recently including in-house architects for YSG builds. Projects have grown in scale and range – from homes to hotels – and although based in Sydney, we're designing around the globe. I feel incredibly fortunate and supported.

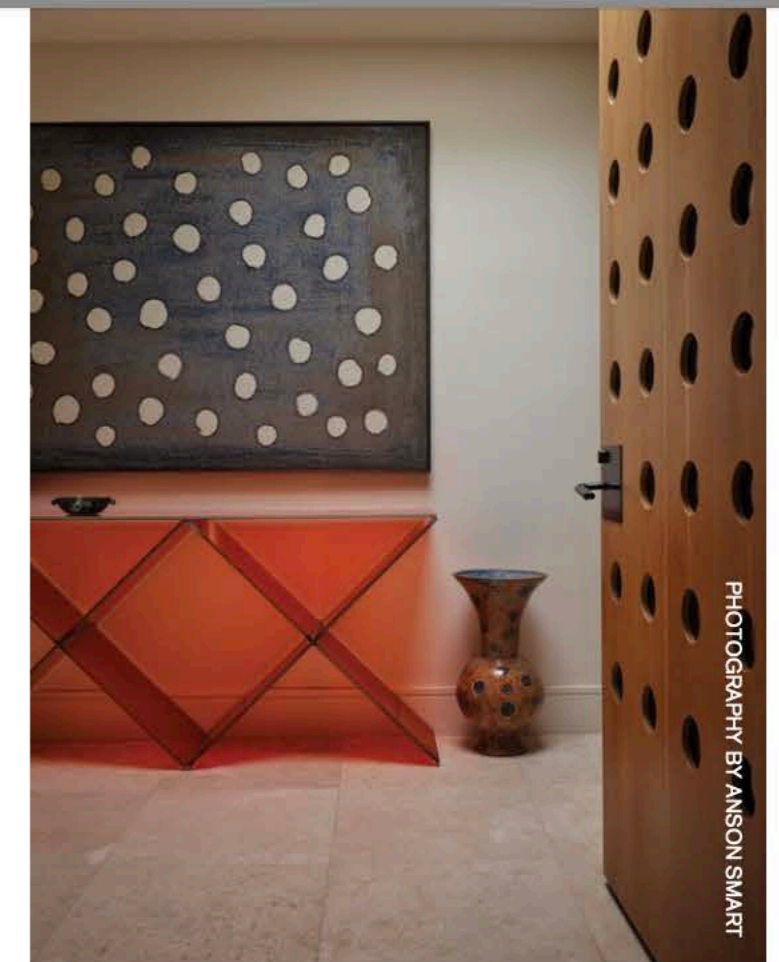
You went to Salone del Mobile, the annual design fair held in Milan earlier in the year. How does being in a space like that unleash creativity? Are there ways in which it inhibits it?

For me, creativity incubates, especially when you're immersed so heavily in things that are inspiring for a concentrated period. Ironically, the visual overload at the design fair can almost work against you in a way as you have such strong visual impressions of installations and work that you've seen. It takes a little while for that to settle. I always find creative surges spring when there isn't anything terribly inspiring around me which makes sense when you think about it as your imagination can run wild to fill the void; at least that's what I've found to be true. What visiting the Salone has done has enriched my desire to create and made me feel hungrier about exhibiting there with custom pieces to birth a broader YSG presence in Europe.

I heard you left behind a music career in your twenties. What's your relationship to playing music now? Do you still do it for fun or does that feel like another life?

I left it in my 30s actually! Which made it even harder after a decade of recording and playing gigs. It was certainly hard to walk away. I used to gig at my brothers or a friend's studio from time to time, and even jam with my husband (who's an excellent guitarist), but as time goes on I play less and less due to work demands. My best mate who's a drummer is coming out of the woodwork and she's keen as mustard to get playing again now her kid is seven. I feel like something might be brewing on the horizon, which is always what I thought would happen. My musical flame is certainly not extinguished.





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Where are the places that feel like home to you now? Is it just Australia, or anywhere else as well?

Australia for now, given the studio is here in Sydney. My father is Egyptian and my mother's Australian and my childhood was spent living between Kuwait, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Sydney. As a kid I never felt at home here or anywhere I lived really. Always felt rather displaced, very non-nationalistic. I think it's a good way to be – to feel worldly and not solely caught up in the politics of your country of origin. It's instilled in me a more global approach to conversation, points of view and my aesthetic appreciation. I like to think of myself as a global nomad and although I've lived in Sydney now for 14 years, I'm getting the itch to experience what else is out there.

Do you ever go back to these places? You've said before that your love for interiors came from being inside in desert temperatures when you were younger — do you take aesthetic inspiration from these places at all, whether that's in real life, or through images you see of them?

I still head back to the Middle East quite regularly. My childhood spent in Saudi, Dubai and Kuwait was purely for professional reasons because my parents worked there. I had little to do with Egypt when I was growing up despite my Dad being Egyptian. Now, Egypt is where I visit most when I return to the Middle East and that's where dad lives now. It's where I want to build a family home on his mango farm. It's where my inspiration is derived: the beautiful buildings (from materials and surface renders plus intricate carvings on solid timber doors, to the incredible ways they tile floors and walls), the bold colours and patterned materials found in the bustling markets, plus the soulful trips down the Nile

where sunsets and night skies engulf you. I bring it all home with me. My favourite part of Egypt is down south in Aswan. I feel transported in time. We are also working on a few YSG projects in Saudi and Dubai, so it's certainly been a nice way to combine business with pleasure. The desert will always hold a special place in my heart.

My experiences in the Middle East have deeply influenced my affiliations with artisans. I'm all for ensuring age-old crafts that demonstrate the human touch (from fabric dyeing to rug weaving and wood craftsmanship) are not only celebrated but are artforms that remain very much alive and explored. So many of my interiors include bespoke design elements that celebrate the maker's touch. Early last year I launched a 12-piece rug range with Tappeti called Real Majik. A favourite rug includes a constellation of Seba stars flickering across a decadent midnight blue sky (they traditionally adorn the ceilings of Egyptian tombs). That particular rug sits in the studio – a nice big patch of my other home.

You're now hosting the beloved TV show *Grand Designs* (congratulations). What was your favourite journey or trip you took while filming the show?

Tasmania. I visited a small convict town best known for its Georgian architecture. More than 150 sandstone buildings were built by convicts in the early 1800's and most of those buildings still stand today. My experience there, however, was rather creepy, and on my last visit there to check on renovation progress, I definitely ran into a ghost. I actually had to go stay with the production crew up the road because I was too unnerved to sleep alone in a house. If I described in detail what happened, no one would believe me. So I'd recommend a day trip there, not an overnighter!