

YASMIN E GHONIEM



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For two free-spirited clients, Sydney-based talent *Yasmine Ghoniem* has designed a brilliantly bonkers holiday home that feels like stepping into a fairytale



Photo: Prue Ruscoe (portrait)

Previous pages: the entrance is wrapped in a patterned blue wallpaper by Milton & King. The ottoman was custom-designed by Ghoniem; side table by Dimorestudio

The idea of having a holiday home is to shut out all the noise and bother of everyday life. What better way to do that than by throwing caution (and design rules) to the wind, creating a space that gently forces you to step away, mind, body and soul? That is exactly what Yasmine Ghoniem, the Sydney-based creative mastermind behind some of Australia's most exciting interiors, has done here for two powerhouse clients: acclaimed comedian, actor and writer Hamish Blake, and Zoë Foster Blake, founder of the wildly successful Australian skincare line Go-To. The couple had acquired a property located a short drive out of Sydney, nestled within a rolling landscape of citrus orchards. Ghoniem, who had worked with them before on their city home, was entrusted with transforming it into a wonderland to host family and friends.

"This couple thinks big and bold; they're rule breakers, not makers," says Ghoniem. "They were after a fun, fantastical feeling the moment the front door swung open." Unlike other coastal or country boltholes, which tend to make a hero of the external view, here the design invites you to look inwards. By cleverly nodding to the setting – think forest-inspired wallpapers, colours of the land, sea and sky, and innovative materials such as padded cork flooring – nature's beauty comes indoors in ways that could place this holiday home anywhere on the planet. "Despite the incredible surroundings, this house nourishes you 100 per cent internally," explains the Egyptian-Australian designer. "The couple wanted spaces that suspend you in a dreamy state – dark, escapist sanctuaries that quiet the mind and send you off into deep slumber, perfect when you're in holiday mode."

Today, the house feels full of joy and wonder, but that wasn't always the case: it was once a cavernous, mock-colonial house whose walls were unified by cold white shades (it was built in the 1990s). "We were asked to cosy up each room while avoiding any internal wall construction," Ghoniem recalls. The studio leaned into curvilinear themes to link the spaces and create a softer flow. An elongated arched door, for example, now leads from the dining room to the sleeping quarters; Victorian-inspired carved blue cabinets bring glamour and whimsy to the entrance vestibule; and an undulating timber base frees the kitchen island from its regimented, modular shackles. Throughout



Above: Yasmine Ghoniem in her studio. Opposite page: in the living room, Moroccan zellige tiles from Di Lorenzo cover the fireplace; the floors are clad in cork. The artwork is by Daniel Domig from gallery Chalk Horse

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In the kitchen, the worktop is made of Rosso Asiago marble, with legs crafted in custom Vixel glass mosaic tiles; the rattan stools are vintage. The lamp was created for the home by Ghoniem, and the roman blinds were made using Sahco fabric



“I like the idea of teasing soft shapes from hard surfaces like timber and stone. We wanted every space to feel like a playground for adults”



Opposite page: the armchair by Aurélien Serre and Giardino floor lamp by Servomuto are both from Moebel; artwork by Clare Milledge from gallery Station

the house, Ghoniem favoured rounded forms, bullnose details and voluptuous silhouettes instead of flattened planes.

“I like the idea of teasing soft shapes from hard surfaces like timber and stone,” says the designer. “In one bathroom, we incorporated beautiful pastel onyx slabs as open shelving and counters. I exaggerated their thickness and gave them a bullnose finish, so their Crayola-like scribbled pattern is really visible on the edges.” Echoing the verdant palette of the surrounding wallpaper, the joinery was painted a glossy Kermit green. Ghoniem is also a fan of the custom dark timber credenza in the lounge, likening it to a “sweet treat” that resembles a puddle of melting chocolate with Malteser-like pull handles. “Given all of the room’s decorative intensity, you don’t spot it immediately, which makes it all the more appealing.” The fireplace that was the only redeeming feature of the original lounge was retained, its girth widened and clad in multicoloured glazed tiles. “We wanted every space to feel like a playground for adults.”

What might at first glance seem like a trippy patchwork of influences is actually a masterclass in maximalism – not the kind you’d associate with English manor houses and French chateaux, but a fresh, energetic approach to the “more is more” philosophy that still makes room for pause and reflection. A case in point is the generous biscuit-hued Aurélien Serre armchair in the open kitchen-dining area, whose fluffy teddy bear-like form invites you to curl up with a book; the mismatched chairs around the dining table (“from rustic vintage pieces with rush seats to classic Thonets”) create a Goldilocks-esque atmosphere at mealtimes, with everyone pondering where to sit. “One of my favourite pieces is the artwork installed above the bed in the principal suite,” says Ghoniem of the piece she commissioned from artist Madeleine Pfull. “To me, it gives the room a *Twin Peaks* vibe that recalls the saying ‘if these walls could talk...’”

“I wanted this house to have a fictional feeling – like an otherworldly utopia you could only possibly visit in your dreams,” the designer continues. “It’s a ‘choose your own adventure’ holiday home, where you can hang out wherever your mood takes you.” Indeed – why should only children get to feel the excitement and wonder of a secret hideaway? AUSTRALIA ysg.studio



Above: the dining room plays with an assortment of seating, from vintage handmade rush-seat chairs from Curated Spaces to classic plywood designs by Thonet

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The guest powder room is anchored by Schumacher's Rolling Hills wallpaper, from Orient House; on the wall is a mirrored cabinet from IKEA, painted a custom colour. A sculpture by Tanika Jellis sits on the shelf. Opposite page: the principal bedroom features an artwork by Madeleine Prull and wall lights from Servomuto

