

# Yasmine Ghoniem crafts expressive and artfully layered spaces



Words by Gitika Garg

Yasmine Ghoniem is one of Australia's most celebrated interior designers. Through her Sydney-based practice, YSG Studio, she has a knack for pushing the boundaries: mixing design eras, colour, pattern and fabric to create spaces that are bold, layered and full of emotion.

Here, Ghoniem talks about balancing minimalism with rich texture, creating custom entertaining devices and how materials should spark imagination, not just serve as function.

#### HOW DO YOU DEFINE GOOD DESIGN?

It would have to combine directional elegance with an undercurrent of exquisite craftsmanship. For me, finding inspiration from materials rather than sourcing them to craft already conceived ideas is the purest approach that lets my imagination run free.

#### WHAT'S ON YOUR DESIGN MOOD BOARD AT THE MOMENT?

My mood board is my memory. I don't reference any of my work with images pinned up in my

studio because the ideas behind them aren't mine. Nothing is ever literal for me. Travel is my sensory activator – that, and childhood memories.

#### WHAT OLD-SCHOOL DESIGN FEATURE DO YOU WANT TO COME BACK?

A dedicated dressing table with incredible lighting surrounding a beautiful mirror that floats above it. Inspiration comes from Maria Callas's lavish dressing room in the film *Maria*.

#### WHO ARE THREE AUSTRALIAN CREATIVES ON YOUR RADAR?

Lesleigh Jermanus, director of fashion label Alemais. We both share Middle Eastern heritage and the same love for the cosmos and beyond. I recently designed the brand's headquarters in Surry Hills with references to lunar planets, mythological kingdoms and aquatic worlds. Also on my radar: Melbourne-based maker Scotty Bemelen and painter Madeleine Pfull.

#### WHAT WAS ONE OF YOUR MOST UNUSUAL CLIENT REQUESTS?

Most challenging (and rewarding) was our first architectural project that involved the built

addition of a living area, plus bathrooms and a parents' retreat, that attached to a Victorian weatherboard in Fitzroy North. Both clients requested a sustainable build, but also possessed radically different design sensibilities: he is Danish with an appreciation for clean finishes, minimal ornamentation and pale timber; she is Egyptian Australian with a passion for pattern, tactility and colour. Merging aesthetic inclinations, we intuitively explored rather than replicated design genres. We built with hempcrete inspired by Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy's mudbrick constructions, and the floors were Middle Eastern-inspired. We selected light Queensland maple to align with the new streamlined joinery, given its soft shade yet expressive wood grain.

#### WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE PROJECTS THAT HAVE USED YOUR SKILLS IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY?

Designing interiors for a gutted penthouse largely surrounded by glass had its challenges. How do you invite cosiness in a large living area without any partitions? Our solution included a [mix of] oversized soft landings, deep-pile custom rugs and stone surfaces.

As [keen] entertainers, our clients requested "conversational custom pieces", including a 360-degree rotating lapis blue granite platter (a unique entertaining device for canapés or cheese). We also clad a drinks trolley in the same blue granite stone we hand cut for the island. ▶

**Above:**  
A project blending Danish and Egyptian design sensibilities.  
ANSON SMART

**Top right:**  
The award-winning designer creates textured spaces.  
PRUE RUSCOE

**Bottom right:**  
A Sydney penthouse featuring contrasting textiles and surfaces.  
PRUE RUSCOE

