

FABRIC OF LIFE

Valentina Piscopo, founder of
online interior design platform
KUKY Design, opens the doors
to her eco-friendly Arabian
Ranches residence

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Interior designer Valentina Piscopo in her sustainable garden. Jute table mats are by local shop *GEORGES* of Dubai and the ceramic bowl is by Dubai-based pottery studio *Cole & Gross*. The table cloth by *Zara Home* is the same one used for Valentina's wedding day in Kenya.



Natural and sustainable materials are paired with textured layers for a calming and inviting experience.

Serenity prevails as we enter the neutral-themed house of Italian interior designer and home stylist, Valentina Piscopo, where subtle, earthy hues are matched with cosy textures and a feel of a calm coastal landscape exudes.

Situated in the folds of Arabian Ranches in Dubai, the home has been designed to reflect Valentina's inviting personality. "I think my

signature aesthetic is an extension of myself," smiles Valentina. "Even if I am considered a minimalist, my homes are full of textures and layers, filled with warmth. They are true family spaces."

An aspiring artist in her early twenties, Valentina discovered an underlying passion for designing furniture and spaces shortly after. Soon enough, she became an entrepreneur and set up her online interior design platform, KUKY Design, in 2019. "I was inspired by the landscape of women entrepreneurs in the region and decided to use my end of employment gratuity on launching my own brand," she reveals. "Having my own brand means I can practice all the things I love doing the most: curating spaces, furnishing homes, styling photo shoots and designing furniture, all while having my own voice. Building a brand and a business is what fulfils me and being able to do most of this from home is a wonderful gift as I get to spend time with my daughter, and that is the most important thing in the world."

Through her remote platform, Valentina connects with clients across the world for projects such as corporate

offices in Ethiopia, two-bedroom apartments in London and remote photo-styling sessions in places such as Saudi. "We have all connected to our homes like never before, so looking around us and the pieces of furniture that make us happy or thinking about how we can improve the space is a natural progression of that. As far as my clients go, if they have a smaller budget, I help them design smart, guide them into realising that we should purchase less but better if they really want a home that makes an impact, visually and ecologically."

What is most striking about Valentina's home is the bespoke furniture, which rhythmically blends with the rest of the space. Known for her soft aesthetic and use of natural and sustainable materials, the home is dotted with handcrafted pieces sourced from different parts of the world – an eclectic mix of heirlooms and picks from her travels.

"My home is definitely filled with trinkets from parts of Asia and I owe that to the time I spent there travelling and working for non-profits," enthuses Valentina. "It opened my eyes to new cultures, architecture and design. These experiences are part of the fabric that is my life and I express it in my designs through the choice of materials."

Valentina's travels have a strong influence on her interiors. "Many of the places I have been fortunate to visit are prolific hubs for handicrafts so there is always a connection between my designs and that part of the world through the choice of materials. I source from skilled craftsmen in Indonesia and my favourite dhurries are handwoven in India. I also spent a large part of my childhood in Kenya, so I have a close connection to



Decorative items collected from travels all around the world influence the interiors of Valentina's home

Handicrafts were sourced from artisans in Indonesia and India to create a home that makes an impact visually and ecologically





Rattan, wicker, jute and wood punctuate various places of the house



Neutral tones create a relaxing ambience

Africa that you can see throughout my home."

Her favourite pieces, however, are the two rattan daybeds. "I use them for guests to sleep in, for lying on the balcony to catch a sunset, and for entertaining around our firepit in the evenings. I constantly move them indoors and outdoors because they are so versatile and lightweight, and it is the best investment piece I own."

A highlight of the abode is the garden which seamlessly transitions from the inside, where rattan, wicker, jute and wood are in symbiosis with the surrounding palm trees and cacti.

Valentina joined forces with Will Bennett, founder of WILDEN Design, to transform the garden into a sustainable sanctuary that would only be made of local plants. "We immediately clicked from the moment we met two years ago," she recalls. "He wanted to bring sustainable garden design to the UAE while being the first to offer remote landscape design services, and I had been a huge advocate of e-design services for the home for over a year, so let's just say we had a lot to talk about."

Will recognised that her old garden was essentially a big green lawn which was hard to maintain and was consuming an enormous amount of water, which wasn't sustainable. The proposed new layout saw the majority of the lawn being replaced with locally sourced gravel from Oman and the nearby Al Hajar Mountains, which has a dreamy powdery cream colour. "He replaced the lawn with a luscious variety of native plants including my favourite *Aerva Javanica*, also known as desert cotton, and elegant *Parkinsonia* trees. We then used reclaimed timber from old scaffolding to create a decking area which is full of knots, holes and more beautiful asymmetries," shares Valentina, noting that sustainable design in the desert does not



The rattan daybed which Valentina considers her best investment piece is often moved indoors and outdoors for moments spent together with family and friends

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Wood features prominently with splashes of white to reflect elements of simplicity



Rattan furniture adds a charming character to the outdoor area



Natural handmade materials are chosen to support artisans and their communities

mean putting unnecessary pressure on resources that the landscape naturally lacks such as water, but rather embracing the materials and handicrafts that are produced locally without importing excessively.

Valentina nurtured an interest in sustainability while working with Jo England, the founder of interior brand Tribe Dubai; one of the first fair-trade home décor brands in the UAE. “I got to learn a huge amount about sustainability, and built an awareness of the topic as well as a love of working with natural handmade materials while also doing some good; supporting artisans and their communities.”

She continues, “I think we can be less consumerist about the way we shop for our home. A trait that surfaces a lot with clients is the accumulation of ‘stuff’ without real purpose or the idea that every wall in the house needs to be filled. [This is because] we have predetermined ideas of what kind of furniture should go in which room instead of thinking what ‘home’ really means to each of us.”

She concludes with a word of advice for those willing to adopt a sustainable lifestyle in which less really is more, “Look at nature for inspiration. That is often where the most sustainable furniture choices come from. Look out for words such as ‘reclaimed’ or ‘recycled’ in products or even a vintage item. That is what makes a home unique to you.” ■



Valentina relaxes on the custom-made sofa in the living room of her villa, flooded with natural light and overtones of white



Handmade and vintage items add purpose and meaning to the interiors