

Curvy



CASITA

*Moving into her first Dubai property during a global pandemic, homegrown interior styling studio C'est ici's co-founder **Monica Durou** demonstrates the impact a few thoughtful renovations can make*

Words by IMAN VAKIL

Photography by NATALIE COCKS



Monica stands by the recessed bespoke niches. Wood rustic table from Crate & Barrel; Decorative items from West Elm, The Bowery Company and Comptoir

An interior view of the living room. Bespoke curvy sofa made by C'est Ici's in-house team; White coffee table made by The Line Concept; Rug from The People Of Sand; Rattan chairs by Wood Culture; Leather cushion by White Moss; Kitchen lights by Normann Copenhagen; Bespoke round cushion



Having had multiple clients in the area, Colombian lawyer-turned-interior-designer Monica Durou fell in love with Dubai's Jumeirah Golf Estates several years ago. After twelve years of living in the UAE, the Durous decided to finally put down their roots and purchase their dream property in February, which over the years, has remained a firm favourite. "The open space and windows with high ceilings were love at first site," Monica recalls. "The property had an amazing structural open layout and the balanced distribution of the rooms was exactly what we were looking for."

But as lockdown struck in mid-March, the impending move evidently became impossible. "To tell you the truth, we got cold feet," Monica admits. "There was so much uncertainty about our jobs and stability in Dubai." Able to postpone their move to April, a modern Scandinavian-influenced, refined Bohemian, monochromatic space came to life just four weeks later. Including some traditional Parisian and Greek features, Monica utilised clean-lined furniture and natural materials to create a warm and organic environment that integrated the needs of her family.

"I AM DEFINITELY THE LATIN, SPIRITED RISK-TAKER"

Starting off with a packed archive of references, which included the homes of Claudia Schiffer, Jennifer Aniston and Kim Kardashian, as well as multiple projects by renowned author Athena Calderone, Monica created a 75-page document outlining the design of 15 spaces in three weeks. "I always kept a file called *My Dream Home* with all my thoughts and inspirations," she smiles. "Then, the day arrived and I just had to structure all those ideas into reality. Yes, it is all about structure and organising your thoughts. That's how it works!"

Structurally, the house needed very little work. First and foremost, the designer implemented neutral oak floors and porcelain over the original, laminated dark-wood floors and beige tiles, adding to the property's open structure. Her next move was to paint the house all-white. "This was the most simple but significant makeover," she says. "Do not underestimate the skirting! By choosing a monochromatic colour palette, the space is open to absolutely anything. While our base colour is within a neutral colour palette, we emphasised on playing with curves, sharp materials, shapes and genres which find a sense of flow." Classic square wall niches were added to seamlessly showcase prized possessions, as well as black-painted steel window frames to give a chic, understated and industrial edge.

With an olive tree inside her living room, Monica created a centralising curved white sofa with C'est ici's in-house team, flanked either side by mid-century lounge chairs. Wishbone chairs surround a wheel table with a ribbed beam in the adjoining dining room, which is overheaded by a curvilinear chandelier and a nearby simple circle mirror. A commissioned painting by Lebanese multidisciplinary artist Ann Gedeon greets visitors in the entrance. The timeless black and white kitchen, with cabinetry by Scavolini, is disrupted by a wood counter and nude lights from Normann Copenhagen. "I was very conscious to add warm touches and one of my favourite finishes of all time, wood slats," she shares. "Ever since Milan Design Week in 2018, I am a fanatic for this finish on all shapes and forms!"

It's easy to see that Monica best works in tandem. With her clients, she turns to her business partner Tatiana Jaramillio. "A second eye and mind is crucial for eye-catching styling. I believe that our recipe, when it comes to designing spaces, is having that second opinion and distinct eye."

Having founded C'est ici with Jaramillio four years ago as a homegrown business dedicated to understanding the nuances of expat life, to date, the duo have completed more than 40 projects over the last five years. "C'est ici's aesthetic is very much influenced by a minimal approach to life with warm touches," shares Monica. "Factors such as

history, greens, sustainable materials and a mix of different raw materials complement our designs. While I definitely follow C'est ici's aesthetic, my style is very much married to my roots."

Within her multicultural family, she turns to her husband. "I am definitely the Latin, spirited risk-taker," she laughs. "My Frenchie is the one who keeps me grounded and always takes a step back." With the indoor greenery a homage to the forests surrounding her childhood home in Bogotá, and the master bedroom's simple white paneling lending an ensuite feel, the couple found that in both Colombia and France, the kitchen is always a hit. "No matter how many spaces we have, we always end up in the kitchen," she admits, letting the naturally dominant space in her family become her labour of love in her 'my turn' moment. ■ cesticiddecor.com



Interior view of the dining area. Bespoke dining table by The Line Concept; Lighting from a boutique in France; Chairs from Wood Culture; Accessories from Urban Nest and The Bowery Company; Plant pot from West Elm; Mirror from Home and Soul; Flooring by Baldozer, Spanish porcelain tiles



Youngest child Gaby's jungle-inspired room. Wallpaper by Paper Wall Sweden; Soft furnishings by Zara Home; Desk and chair by Ferm Living; Rug from Wood & Steel; Cushions from Minimal White

"WHILE I DEFINITELY FOLLOW C'EST ICI'S AESTHETIC, MY STYLE IS VERY MUCH MARRIED TO MY ROOTS"



Interior view of the master bedroom. Side table from Fronteriors; Art piece by The Bowery Company. Side lamp by HKliving sourced through Urban Nest; Bench from White Moss; Cushions and linen from The White Company; Other cushions from Minimal White; Throw from Zara Home; Rug from West Elm



The play area. Lion décor from Martin and Ella; Storage system from IKEA; Art from Georges of Dubai



Monica sits on the bespoke, white curvy sofa made by the in-house team at C'est Ici; Cushion from White Moss and rug from The People Of Sand