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A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Nada Debs opens her heart and home to MOJEH, revealing how her belief in craft as 'a feeling that goes beyond geography, language and culture' is part of everything she lives and breathes

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Nada wears shirt and trousers by Ralph Lauren, belt by Max&Co, earrings and necklace by Stone Fine Jewelry and her own ring and shoes

Stepping into the home of Nada Debs in Jumeirah, one could be forgiven for thinking they'd been transported to a paradise in harmony with nature and luxury all at once. Flanked on both sides by an outdoor garden that encircles the traditional Arab villa, there are elements both traditional and modern, such as the breeze blocks and palm trees, cobbled pathways and fountains, that connect the old and new.

"My personal style is very minimalistic and pure," says Nada. "But I also love intricacy, and I love the contrast between something bold and pure."

Seeking balance and differentiation in everything she does, Nada Debs is unapologetically aware of the tension she enjoys between detail and form, chaos and simplicity. In fact, this is exactly where her unique approach comes to the forefront.

"It's finding duality — a balance between opposites," she says. And that's what her second home in Dubai, after Beirut, feels like. Reflecting her signature style of handcrafted furniture, it is a place that is filled with memories from all over the world, including some of her designs that bear the trademarks of her approach, which she calls 'handmade and heartmade'.

"I first learned about the importance of craft in London, somewhere between

1992 and 2000, and everywhere I turned people were talking about preservation of craft techniques," recalls Nada.

Growing up in Japan, her love for Lebanon was a deep-seated longing to belong to a place that held the sentiments of her heart, and this is how the meaning of traditional crafts took on a new form for her.

"I realized people wanted to preserve antique pieces from their grandparents' homes, but it wasn't something they could

use. I thought this was totally unexplored and I wanted to make it relevant and functional in this part of the world."

Some of her most popular collections include hand-crafted furniture and accessories, featuring mother-of-pearl and tin inlay techniques, marquetry and geometric patterns with Middle Eastern influences. Creating customised furniture that is reflective of her unique style, Nada has decorated the office of the Minister of

“LOCAL IS THE NEW GLOBAL, AND GLOBAL IS THE NEW LOCAL”

NADA DEBS



Nada works with marginalised craft communities to not only build bridges between people, but to keep traditional crafts alive for the next generation

Foreign Affairs in the UAE, the Arab League Headquarters in Cairo and the UAE's Mission to the United Nations, showcasing what she describes as a 'neo-Arabian' identity in all of her design approaches.

"My work represents who we are today; a mix of East and West," expresses Nada. "We have the spirituality aspect and we are open to modernity. I like what is happening today, because we are still trying to preserve our identity on a global scale."

Aware of this sense of belonging and identity that is innate in every human being, Nada's mission has been to preserve time-honoured traditions and crafts, working with marginalised communities and craftsmen to explore and create patterns that can be linked both to this part of the world as well as across cultures.

"Local is the new global, and global is the new local," she declares with an audacity that comes from over 20 years of experience. She makes a point of connection to her collaboration with IKEA for the LJUVA collection which was well received by her clientele all over the world, although

some were frustrated with its Middle East-exclusive availability. Growing up in Japan and studying at the Rhode Island School of Design in the United States, Nada seeks to find connections between cultures and people through contemporary craft design with meaning, purpose and memory.

"Carpets make a space a home," she points out. "It started with the Arab Bedouins. From the minute they put the carpet down in a tent, it becomes home. For me, carpets have such a strong value and, inherently, it is about identity and creating that sense of belonging with every piece I create. But it is also about customising everything to preserve the identity."

In her home in Dubai, several pieces reiterate this sense of belonging, coming together to tell the story of a home filled with global culture, memories and traditions.

Working with marginalised craft communities is close to Nada's heart, and



Nada wears jumpsuit and belt by Max&Co, Santoni shoes and earrings and ring by Obari

PERSONAL STYLE

How has your style changed over the years?

I used to be more conservative and pickier. Now, I am more relaxed about my style and I like to relate it to my work, so I focus on colours. It is not so much about fashion or style, but I like mixing and matching. A style staple that I am in love with right now is a black blazer from Comme des Garçons Noir Kei Ninomiya, and the brand Feng Chen Wang. I also love a classic black or white blazer with a strand of pearls.

You are a fabulous host. What are some of your must-haves for an event?

Lighting and music are two important aspects. I like to be generous with nuts, cakes and small bites. When it comes to drinks, cups and cutlery are not important but for dinner they are. For me, candlelight and music in the background for a play on lighting and shadows is important. I like to have some kind of incense, as scent is important because people also enjoy an ambience which is cosy even if there is no food served. Smiling is important for a host.

When it comes to personal style in jewellery, what is your preference?

I mix and match a lot. I wear things from 20 years ago and I always find a way to use things. My Arabesque ring is a perfect representation of my identity, and when I wear it people recognise that it is mine instantly.

What about skincare and facials?

I use different products and keep changing from time to time. I have a deep philosophy that if you are happy it reflects on your face, but I am also a believer in face massage rather than covering up with creams. Honestly, I would rather run or swim fast to keep my skin glowing as I am more about natural skincare.

What's your favourite place to find inspiration and creativity in the UAE?

Comptoir 102 and The Grey. The first is a place that is full of objects and ideas and the second is pure, with one tone of colour and a wonderful backdrop.

What are you currently reading?

I have been reading about Japanese design, and I'm currently enjoying *Wabi Sabi: For Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*. I find the Japanese essence of design is what I love because of the way it is viewed. I have a lot of other books on Japanese design because it gives me a justification for the way I do things, helping me understand how I design the way I do.

What are you listening to at the moment?

Material Matters by Grant Gibson, a podcast of interviews with different designers. I love the richness of the discussions about their relationships with a particular material or technique. [🔗](#)



also her true passion. She sees this as a way to keep the crafts alive, building bridges between people and connecting craftsmen to their innate talents and the wider world. She recently visited Pakistan for a special Carapace table created in collaboration with Studio Lel which is inspired by the city of Peshawar, one of the oldest cities in South Asia.

"When you're talking to the crafts people from the marginalised communities, they are so eager to learn and do things," Nada explains. "I always find it exciting to work with them, because not only do I motivate them, but they too start using their creativity which means I am tapping into their mental horizons. That gives me an immense sense of satisfaction and pleasure."

In her living room, the Oculus Carpet attracts attention for its distinctive texture, pattern and Arab orientation. Similarly, the Transcendence carpet or the YOU and I Collection of carpets have garnered much admiration due to their detailing and storytelling. Made in collaboration with Zuleya by FMBI to support young carpet weavers in Afghanistan, it is a perfect expression of Nada's vision to create crafted heirlooms out of objects that have souls, stories, and meaning; preserving tradition for the new generations and igniting a spark that connects conscious consumers

to marginalized communities in all corners of the world.

"I am a big believer in passion," she says with a smile. "Even when I look at children, I want to find that one thing that they are special in. That is what I see in those craftsmen, and when you give them suggestions, they suddenly open up and there's that sparkle in their eye. Once you've found this passion, it is like having found your *raison d'être*."

Eager to explore new opportunities, Nada ventured into sustainability with Kohler WasteLAB to create Transcendence — a range of hand-crafted custom tiles for a traditional hammam experience, which was displayed at the Design Miami/2022 exhibition. Made from tons of landfill waste, the tiles reflect an arch aesthetic and capture Nada's view of culture and craftsmanship, giving her signature approach to design a deeper meaning.

"Sustainability is a very important subject to me, but it has lost its meaning," Nada explains. "I love the Kohler WasteLAB tiles because of the circulatory aspect of the product. These are made from faulty and wasted tiles, which are redesigned to give them a new life."

It is this circle of life that Nada seeks to find when she gets to work. Leading a team of 20 designers in Gemmayze, Beirut, there's



always something to create. But in addition to products, accessories and furniture, Nada also enjoys the interior design of commercial and residential spaces.

Friends, family and clients seek out her innate ability to add warmth and richness to any space and she effortlessly adds her signature touch, which is evident in everything she takes on.

Her home is a true 'home away from home' where she brings the essence of the world together, with a variety of cultures and stories that come forth from every piece of furniture, accessory or element.

From the paintings on the wall to the furniture on the patio, and from the consoles that are functional, versatile conversation-starters to the scent that welcomes you when you walk in, everything has a story waiting to be shared, retold and revived for its nostalgic memory. It's these memories that linger in your mind and heart after you've spent just a few hours at home with Nada Debs.

"When it comes to my work in design, I see sustainability as the sustenance of work where we use our hands, instead of machines," concludes Nada "This preserves our identity, and with heirlooms that we create, it can be cherished and not thrown away. This is the sustainability of life, family and memories."

"I LOVE THE CONTRAST BETWEEN SOMETHING BOLD AND PURE"

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LIFESTYLE

What is an ideal day like in your life?

I start morning with meditation and silence. I write my thoughts and read a little. I try to keep the early mornings for myself, and include exercise in the first one or two hours. In Beirut I walk my dog, watch the sea and the sun over the horizon. Around 9:30am I start work and stay until 7pm. I fit in lunch with a friend or colleague, and in the evening I like to unwind with yoga, friends or a movie so that I can have time for myself at the end of the day.

What is your secret to remaining motivated and balanced?

I meditate for 20 minutes every day. Even though I stopped it for a year, I have now decided to start up again, as it keeps me grounded. Time alone and personal space keeps me balanced.

How about your fitness routine and approach to wellness?

Swimming is very important to me. I swim daily for about 2km and the rhythm, workout and the yoga that follows are all part of my approach to fitness and wellness. The balance of activities is perfect.

What are the core family values that you uphold in your company?

Integrity, honesty, transparency and generosity. Money is never the motivator, but integrity is, and I like to keep clients happy.

Tell us about your favourite place at home?

I like my bedroom. At the home in Dubai, it overlooks the garden and in Beirut, it overlooks the sky and mountains. Nature is a common element in both places.



Nada lets her emotions dictate her style, starting with colours and adding accessories according to feeling. Blouse and skirt, Amal Al Raisi; earrings and ring, Marli; shoes, Nada's own

Where do you find yourself being most creative for work?

It's a café when so many people are around. I need the chaos around me and that is when I am able to create.

What are some of the most treasured pieces you have at home?

I collect things that have a craft message. I keep my house minimal but I pick up endless treasured pieces during my travels. For example, I went to Uzbekistan and I got tea cups which I loved from there. I like many crafted objects and it is not about being expensive or cheap, but it is often something that has a form, pattern or texture that attracts my attention. (1)