

A creative, customised celebration of interior design

The international designer Maggy Monsef has gained widespread recognition for her ability to create standout spaces that are fresh, functional and as individual as her clients. Here, she talks to Artscoops about designing spaces that have both luxury and liveability at their heart.



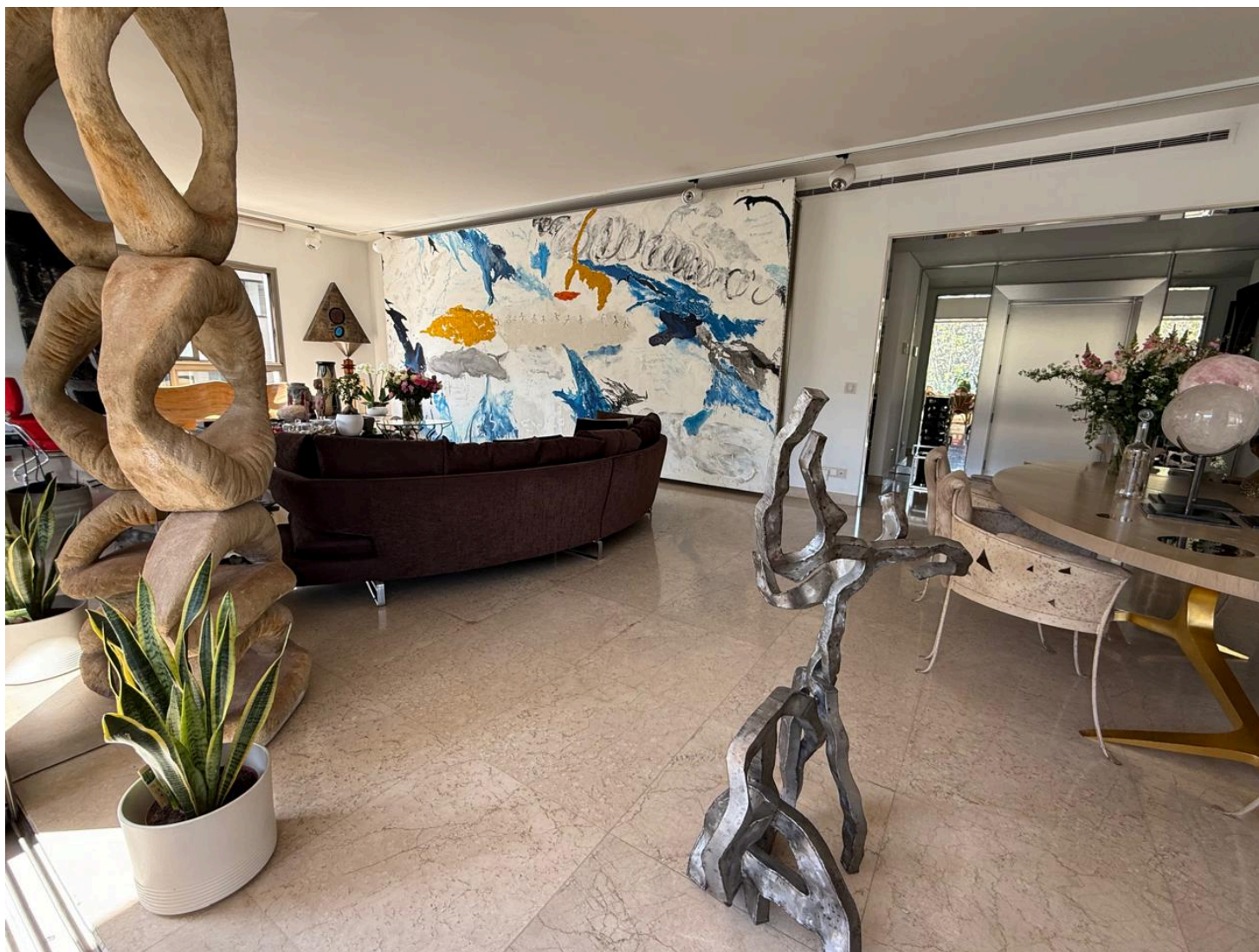
Maggy Monsef

A quick 360° video tour of Maggy Monsef's home in Lebanon is all it takes to realise that this international designer doesn't just champion an eclectic approach in her work, but also lives and breathes it.

In fact, this impromptu moment offers an insightful glimpse of what Maggy has become so well known for, which is bringing together delightfully diverse artworks and collectable furniture that seemingly have little in common but somehow dovetail brilliantly and effortlessly in a space.

During this whirlwind tour, which Maggy navigates with zeal, I catch sight of standout paintings, sculptures, decorative pieces and collectables created across the centuries and around the world by both renowned household names and exciting, emerging talent.

Superb sculptures by the Iraqi artists Ahmed Albahrani and Zaha Hadid, among many others, can be found alongside intriguing ancient Mesopotamian relics and gold dating back to 5000 BC and impressive Phoenician artefacts.



Left is Lips sculpture by Nastaran Safaei

As the tour continues, a full-size, exquisitely sensual lips sculpture by the Iranian sculptor and multimedia artist Nastaran Safaei takes us into a new realm, positioned, with inexplicable complete compatibility, adjacent to an authentic set of Russian dolls. Backdrops are equally impressive and eclectic in this unique space. A poignant figurative painting by the Lebanese artist Marwan Sahmarani catches the eye, while a formidable, 5-metre-long work by the contemporary abstract painter Sigrid Gloerfelt is unmissable.

Pops of colour are also plentiful, provided by whimsical furniture and fun soft furnishings that include scatter cushions in a vibrant Venezuelan tapestry. Indeed, the influence of The Americas is palpable in Maggy's home, with paintings by several of the region's artists adding colour, character and individuality to her walls. The prestigious Cuban artists Vladimir de Leon Llaguno, Aisar Jalil Martinez, Noel Morera and Li D. Fong are among those from this part of the world whose artworks are livening up Maggy's walls, along with the Brazilian painter Roberto Custodio.

In theory, everything should clash in this edgy Aladdin's cave that Maggy calls home, but somehow it doesn't; instead, the space is warm and welcoming, taking the form of a playful and creative celebration of interior design, art and culture from around the world. Significantly, it also incorporates the essential elements of comfort, liveability and functionality, with doses of feng shui and zen thrown in for good measure.

Talking me through this tour, Maggy explains that the sources of her art, furniture and collectibles are as diverse as the pieces themselves.

"Some of them are from auction houses like Sotheby's in New York, while others are lucky finds from Paris flea markets," she admits with a smile. "I think of this space as one that is full of crazy collectibles from mix and match cultures. A fusion of East and West."

The space undoubtedly reflects Maggy's tastes but also her individual personality, which she stresses is always a priority when designing and creating customised interiors for clients, from the eclectic art pieces she suggests to the collectible and functional furniture.

"Yes, I love to bring eclectic touches to a space and always try to encourage the people I'm working with to see the potential of this approach. But getting to know clients - their character and lifestyle - is top of the list," she explained.

Establishing a relationship with her clients helps Maggy to begin putting the building blocks in place for a successful project, which she insists on overseeing from end to end.



Maggy's room reflects her eclectic tastes and talent for customising interiors

"This is a critical aspect of the project, when I begin working out what's important for the people involved - their specific needs and the functionality of the space," she said. "I like to spend time with clients and observe their lifestyle and their interactions. There's a lot of psychology involved."

Giving examples, Maggy explained that if fine dining or entertaining are an important aspect of someone's lifestyle, she may decide to put more focus on the design element, such as the use of rich, luxurious materials and layout concepts such as furniture selections incorporating modality.

"On the other hand, if we're talking about a family home where young children live, other aspects may be more important, such as avoiding pieces with sharp edges and perhaps deciding against fabrics in light colours," she said.

Fostering a relationship with her clients also paves the way for Maggy to bring her own interior design expertise into play and present her ideas.

"I love the opportunity to get creative, sharing my thoughts on how to mix and match concepts, to give a space a modern feel and eclectic look, whether it's adding a statement dining table, a crazy

chair or a splash of unexpected colour on a wall," she said.

One nugget of wisdom Maggy tries to share with her clients is the fact that a space can be all encompassing in its appeal, if deeply thought through.



Backdrop is large-scale painting by Sigrid Gloerfelt

"I try to teach my clients to use all five of their senses when designing their ideal space, to imagine they're entering a cave and coming across one discovery after another," she said. "Perhaps it could be the music and the signature scent of a type of flower, alongside the more obvious selection of art furniture, chosen for its texture and visual stimulus. Even the choice of fruit or chocolate in a bowl can make a difference. My aim is to create a place that touches all the senses when you enter it."

This highly individual approach to design has been key to Maggy's resounding success in a field which she entered almost by chance, as she explained with a smile.

"I had a completely different career, which I entered after studying in Paris, where I obtained my Master's in Corporate Finance and completed a one-year Post Master's degree in Market Finance, Commodities and Stock Options," she said. "But I've always had a passion for building knowledge, broadening my horizons and understanding how things work."

It was these qualities that inspired Maggy to take on the challenge of restoring a Lebanese property herself and then offer to do the same for a friend who started out by simply asking her for the phone number of an architect.

"I told them that I could do it and they agreed to give me a trial," she admitted. "I knew I had to get it right, so I worked day and night, seven days a week for two years to ensure it met the brief."

The project was a resounding success, leading to extensive media coverage, which helped to raise the profiles of both the property and Maggy herself.

Since then, she has never looked back, building on her natural ability and eye for design with qualifications obtained in Milan. Today, her impressive portfolio of projects ranges from interior design for both commercial spaces and residential properties worldwide to furniture and collectible designs that include successful collaborative ventures.

Hotels, restaurants, compounds and homes are among the places that she has transformed, restored or created, alongside numerous other niche projects.



Painting by Marwan Sahmarani

"I always knew I had a creative side and an eye for design," she explained. "I also knew that I didn't necessarily want to follow a more traditional path like some of my friends. I think the challenge was finding the avenue to channel my creativity."

Maggy cites the influence of her father, the architect Camille Monsef, in her professional development, noting that watching him work ignited a passion for the world of design. Her love for travel has also been instrumental in helping to bring projects to life. Smiling, she explained that her favourite pastimes include gathering ideas and inspiration from the flea markets, high-end galleries and industry fairs in Paris, New York, London and Milan.

"I think of each project as a blank canvas and then focus on making it a work of art," she said. "I've been told that the ability to see what could be, instead of what is, and then make it a reality, is one of my strengths and I think this is one of the best compliments that an interior designer could hope to receive."

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