

DESERT DYNAMISM

The married duo behind Desert River, a funky Dubai-based furniture rental company, have created a contemporary urban oasis that takes advantage of enviable verdant views

TEXT BY ELEANOR JOSLIN
PHOTOGRAPHY STEFAN LINDEQUE

PROFILE

THE OWNERS Claudia van der Werf and Michiel Schröder founded Desert River, an online furniture and lighting store and rental business, in Dubai 15 years ago, two years after moving to the UAE. They bought a three-bedroom apartment in Fairways West, The Greens, six years ago, where they live with their two Persian cats, Louis and Ziggy.

THE HOME The Dutch couple transformed their apartment after remodelling a guest bedroom into a study, upgrading two shower rooms, and opening the kitchen onto the living-dining space to soak up the expansive views over the world-class Emirates Golf Club course.



Claudia and Michiel created open-plan rooms where they could take advantage of the panoramic views outside. They have effectively zoned these two areas with a contemporary concrete wall and cooler white and blue tones in the kitchen versus warmer shades around the dining table.



With Mick Jagger belting out The Rolling Stones’ Start Me Up from an original Wurlitzer Jukebox, artwork propped “studio style” on the Scandinavian wood floors, a playful peppering of vintage tins and trinkets, not to mention two Persian cats strutting around with snazzy lions mane haircuts, there’s an air of eccentricity and quirkiness in the confidently styled apartment of Dutch couple Claudia van der Werf and Michiel Schröder.

As the owners of Desert River, an online shop and rental company of furniture and lighting, which is known for bringing funky brands like Fatboy to the regional market, it’s no surprise that their apartment in The Greens, Dubai, is home to statement pieces with stories to tell.

‘Our home is contemporary with a touch of vintage and quirkiness, it’s certainly not a standard home,’ says Claudia. You won’t find a TV in their lofty apartment, as they prefer to watch the stunning panoramic vistas of the Emirates Golf Club greens ▶



BECAUSE EVERYTHING IS HANDPICKED THERE ISN’T ONE
PIECE IN OUR HOME THAT DOESN’T HAVE A NICE
STORY BEHIND IT OR A GREAT JOB TO DO



Above The Hacker kitchen features atmospheric downlighting and a sleek Carrara marble counter top, while the blue mirrored splashback was inspired by the kitchen of celebrated designer Karim Rashid. **Top** Kartell chairs, a Tom Dixon light and an IKEA table mixes materials and styles in the dining area. **Opposite** The lounge is furnished with an IKEA sofa upgraded with velvet upholstery, a Noguchi table and Pierre Paulin’s Slice of Orange chair, plus an authentic Wurlitzer jukebox.



OUR STYLE IS CONTEMPORARY WITH A TOUCH OF VINTAGE AND QUIRKINESS TO IT



and the Dubai Marina skyline beyond. The open-plan living area is full of eye-catching elements, mixing flea market finds with designer pieces from Pierre Paulin, Isamu Noguchi, Kartell and Tom Dixon. Giving the space a casual yet creative feel, Tolix stools are repurposed as plant pot stands, special edition Campbell's soup tins feature as quirky accessories, a concrete wall adds an industrial touch, while framed retro posters and canvases move from room to room.

'Who says artwork should be fixed to the wall?' laughs Claudia. 'I like our pictures on stools or on the floor as it gives me the flexibility to move them around. I don't want things to be too precious in our home; it's a living space not a museum.' Like many of their collected pieces, they were attracted to artwork that spoke to them and has a story, from market stalls in New York, antique shops in Brussels and galleries in Amsterdam.

Fans of London's vibrant culture and design scene, Claudia and Michiel have a number of intriguing collectibles from the English capital. "London is my favourite city so I like to have a few accents around that I've bought from there," says Claudia, who lived in the city

for a spell, as well as Marrakesh and Brussels, where she met Michiel, before they moved to Dubai 17 years ago.

Their office features an industrial ceiling light, an authentic piece from London's now defunct Concorde hangar, and a red serving trolley from the obsolete Canada 3000 airline. In the living room, cushions from Kirkby Design are patterned with the design found on upholstery in London's Tube carriages. Their interest in airline memorabilia comes from both Claudia and Michiel's fathers working in the industry for many years, fuelling their shared curiosity in the genre.

They also have an eye for artisanal products made with care and quality. While they bought the apartment six years ago and instantly remodelled the kitchen to open the room up to the views enjoyed from the living and dining areas, they waited another five years to upgrade their bathrooms. Now they're a statement of colour and character, thanks to beautiful tiles from UAE makers Mosaico, which Claudia first spotted at a design exhibition in Dubai.

'I visit a lot of trade fairs for work which introduces me to new ideas and brands,' she explains. 'While I wanted the overall bathroom aesthetic to be quite minimal, I ►



Clockwise from left The shower rooms have a masculine mid-century aesthetic to them; here the guest shower room features a floating vanity unit from Bagno Design, lacquered chevron wall tiles from RAK Ceramics, and artisanal floor tiles from Mosaico with a vintage patina. The home office has been transformed with an interior crittal window that brings in the golf course views. The hallway features a Kartell mirror and artwork placed "studio style" on the Nordic Homeworx wood floor, which is laid throughout.

also wanted a pop. I saw these tiles by Mosaico and knew they would add a special touch.’ She chose blue as a cool, calming colour for the master bathroom and to complement the simple palette in the bedroom, and went for a more outspoken mustard blend in the guest bathroom; the bold hues and vintage patina of the tiles are cause for conversation when guests visit.

Another eye-catching design element is the crittal window that provides their home study with natural light and mesmerising views of the golfing greens. With such vistas a rare sight from many of Dubai’s centrally-located high-rise apartments, the wall-to-wall balcony view in the living room was a particular pull when they bought the apartment, and they decided to take full advantage by remodelling aspects of the layout.

‘We instantly loved the view over the golf course, with the skyline of Dubai Marina in front of us,’ adds Claudia. ‘While the layout wasn’t very interesting because the kitchen was a closed room and blocked the view from the entrance, we could see that it had great bones and plenty of potential. Now, we’ve opened up the kitchen and added the crittal window we can enjoy the view from wherever are, even when we’re at home working. It’s amazing.’

Her favourite spot in the apartment is the panoramic balcony, where she and Michiel enjoy the far-reaching scenery from ‘60s-style Fermob chairs, bought from their company Desert River.

Fifteen years ago, the idea for the successful rental side of their business was born from a single product that caught their eye at a design show.

‘We were at an exhibition and we saw these gorgeous Moonlights from Germany, and the manufacturer was looking for an agent so we thought we’d give it a go,’ recalls Claudia. ‘However, because the light was a premium product people asked if they could rent them instead, and then we knew we were onto something that wasn’t being widely offered in Dubai yet.

‘When we added Fatboy that was our breakthrough because it was established in the Netherlands with a young and trendy look. We brought the brand to the region just as designers and consumers in Dubai were also becoming more interested in modern items and funky interiors.’

Now they have multiple brands for hire and purchase, including Slide and Imagilights, plus vintage vehicles for party hire, which can be transformed into branded bars, DJ booths, coffee carts, food trucks and more. ■



This page and opposite The master shower room mirrors the guest’s, although with blue Mosaico tiles to complement the details in the master bedroom, while the Fatboy rug and cushions add character.

STYLE FILE

How to get the look



Fatboy square velvet cushions
DesertRiver.com,
Dh139 each



Philippe Starck Louis Ghost Chair Kartell,
Dh1,173



Noguchi coffee table Vitra,
Dh7,218



Tom Dixon copper pendant light
Robinsons, Dh2,370



Wind sofa
Broste Copenhagen
Dh6,580



Kährs Artic Oak wood floor, Unity collection
Nordic Homeworx,
Dh355 per square metre



Ligne Blanche Andy Warhol scented candle
Amara.com, Dh224