

Star in the east

Beauty blooms in the desert for this expat Australian family, who've created a bright, welcoming oasis in Dubai.

STORY Rosa Senese | STYLING Georgia Macmillan | PHOTOGRAPHY Abbi Kemp

OUTDOOR DINING AREA Georgia Macmillan and husband Ben share the excitement of the season with baby William and five-year-old Olivia. A blue-and-white theme evokes a cool, fresh ambience in the desert landscape of Dubai. Napkins, cushions and 'Mirande Hydrangea' tablecloth, Georgia Macmillan. Wineglasses, Riedel. Small ceramic vessels, Bliss Flowers. Antique ginger jars, Silver baubles, Creative Minds. 'Sinnerlig' pendant lights, Ikea. ▶



When in Dubai...

Georgia's favourite haunts include the cafes and homeware boutiques of The Courtyard retail hub in Al Quoz and, just across the road, the Alserkal Avenue art and design precinct. She and Ben love to take visitors to lunch at XVA Art Hotel in Al Fahidi; from there, it's easy to stroll to Dubai Creek, jump on a traditional dhow and explore the historic part of town. "And don't miss experiencing sunset in the desert," says Georgia.

LIVING The coffee table and armchairs are from Georgia's childhood home in Queensland. "It's lovely to give them new life in the desert," she says. Sofas, BoConcept. Cushions, Georgia Macmillan. Pendant light, Tribe Dubai. Rug, From Jaipur With Love. Artworks by Georgia (left) and her mother, Jenny Macmillan.

"Whether it's for two years or 10, you need to make your home a home." GEORGIA MACMILLAN

Blue-sky days, weekends spent on white-sand beaches, a kindergartener just starting Nippers... It sounds like an idyllic Australian lifestyle, but for artist and textile designer Georgia Macmillan, home for now is Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, lapped by the warm waters of the Persian Gulf.

Georgia confesses to being "shocked" when husband Ben floated the idea of leaving their inner-Sydney loft conversion for a career opportunity in this financial hotspot, but after a brief reconnaissance trip and conversations with expats, she warmed to the possibilities.

The couple made the move in 2013 with daughter Olivia, now five (baby William came along 18 months ago). They inspected more than 20 rental properties before finding this villa in the Al Safa district, with an elegant white facade ringed by a landscaped garden. The ground floor featured familiar open-plan living and dining spaces. Upstairs were three bedrooms, including a main with ensuite, and outside, shaded spaces for entertaining in cooler months.

"I imagined we'd be living in an apartment, so I sold a lot of furniture before we left," Georgia says with regret. Undaunted, she had another container shipped from Australia, including pieces from her childhood that her parents had kept in storage. These give the home a wonderful sense of continuity.

Living in a rental, there's only so much that the couple can reasonably change or invest in. "The maroon doors throughout, however, had to go," says Georgia with a laugh. "A splash of paint, textiles, stacks of books and framed artworks - including those by your children - are easy and affordable." Art by Georgia's grandmother and mother also adorns the walls.

Georgia's own artistry has bloomed in Dubai. A former broadcast journalist, she took up watercolour painting here, a hobby that evolved into her own textiles and homewares range. The large landing upstairs is now her studio, where she creates exquisite works that are printed onto linen and canvas. Her summery themes, inspired by the family's travels, energise the whole house.

Of course, there are challenges with any expat lifestyle. In this case, they include a hankering for sausage rolls from Sydney's Bourke St Bakery, occasional dust storms, fierce summer temperatures and fine desert sand that gets in everywhere. "I always have sand in my shoes!" Georgia laughs. Even so, the family enjoys Dubai's strong sense of community, its multicultural richness and short-haul travel opportunities to Europe.

"I imagined that being an expat was a transient state," she says, "but this is life and whether it's for two years or 10, you need to make your home a home." ▶

MARINE MOMENT

Cooling hues of blue and grey

'Avocado Dash' cushion ('Indigo Spots' reverse shown)

'Mirande Hydrangea' tablecloth

Haymes Paint Swedish Blue



Festive flair

Although a Muslim emirate, this cosmopolitan city celebrates festivals of all faiths. "Dubai goes to town on the Christmas decorating front," says Georgia. "It's so beautiful. Carollers wander the streets at night. We usually buy a real fir tree imported from Canada – it costs a small fortune but the scent is heavenly." A highlight of the season is the annual Carols in the Desert singalong, a big drawcard for expat families.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In the hallway, Muuto 'Dot' wall hooks from Great Dane are a handy way to hang festive wreaths; the cute reindeer ornaments were sourced from the Dubai branch of US homeware chain Crate & Barrel. Rustic Solimene plates bring a touch of Positano grace to a tablecloth in Georgia's own 'Mirande Hydrangea' design. Landscaping around the elegant villa features familiar plantings of lilly pilly, frangipani and bougainvillea. Upstairs, the spare bedroom has been transformed into a showroom for her textiles collection, featuring a scalloped bedhead in Faraglioni Blue Check linen. **OPPOSITE** Georgia used colourful linen offcuts from her textiles range to create a one-of-a-kind Christmas tree. Wrapping paper, Ikea. Artworks (clockwise from top left) by French artist Jacquin, an unknown artist (purchased in Provence) and Australian painter Michael Herron. ▶

BACKYARD In this dry, desert environment, artificial grass copes better than the real thing. “The irony is that we still have to hose it once a week to clean off the dust,” says Georgia. Labradoodle Freddy made the trip from Sydney with the family. The teak bench is another piece once owned by Georgia’s parents. Play tent, Rainbows and Clover. Cushions and fabric, Georgia Macmillan.



**FEATURE PLANTS
& TREES**

ENTRANCE
Lilly pilly (*Syzygium*)

BACKYARD
Frangipani (*Plumeria*)
Bougainvillea
Artificial grass



LOOK WE LOVE

A refreshing blue-and-white scheme provides cool visual relief, complemented by the all-natural appeal of woven fibres.

Currency conversion correct at time of printing.

1 'Sinnerlig' pendant light, \$89, Ikea; ikea.com.au. 2 Porcelain ornaments in 'Winter Country', \$70 (left), and 'Neoclassical Disc', \$50, Wedgwood; wwr.com.au. 3 'Wood Leaf' wooden wreath, \$45/six; Florabelle; florabelle.com.au. 4 'Royal Ivory' wool-silk rug (2.4x2.95m), \$7800, Loom Rugs; loomrugs.com. 5 *Lorax Tree* acrylic artwork in oak frame, \$6950, by Kerry Armstrong; kerryarmstrongart.com.au. 6 Cotton-canvas and wood teepee, \$320, Hardtofind; hardtofind.com.au. 7 'Indigo Garden' (front) and 'Big Inky Smudge' linen cushions, about \$76 each, Georgia Macmillan; georgiamacmillanpaints.com. 8 'Sienna' rattan armchair with linen cushions, \$1399, Naturally Cane; naturallycane.com.au. 9 'Flower Bomb' porcelain vase, \$79, Samantha Robinson Porcelain; samantharobinson.com.au. 10 'Hotel Bin' rattan basket, \$50, Alfresco Emporium; alfrescoemporium.com.au. H&G