

A contemporary home with echoes of Africa [hh6-7](#)



# house & home



Andrew Twort / redcover.com

The once humble kitchen has become the social hub of the home, and top designers from around the world are taking up the challenge with polished enthusiasm [hh3](#)

## hot talent



Fred Rieffel has been on everybody's watch list in recent years, winning praise for his innovative furniture designs. His duo couch, created for Mouchamps, is an exercise in efficiency, with seating on all sides. See [www.fredrieffel.com](http://www.fredrieffel.com)

## home in the life of Marie-Noelle Swiderski

## 'I found my home in Blanchard'

Marie-Noelle Swiderski is the managing director of Blanchard, a London-based interior design company that she introduced to Dubai in 2006

**q Which cities have you called home?**

**a** I've lived in four; I grew up in Ottawa, then Montreal, Paris and London. Both my parents were professors and we'd travel a lot; summers in Italy, Poland and Romania. Home was always Ottawa until I moved to Paris to study interior design at the studio of Andr e Putman.

**Now you're in Dubai, does Ottawa still mean home?**

The house that stays in my mind the most is the one where I grew up. It was a beautiful, big house in a huge lot in Canada, and had the best of both worlds – huge greenery, but only 15 minutes from downtown. It's the house I grew up in until I was 13. It was initially quite small but then we renovated it and it became this huge, bright house. Every time I go back it feels like it is bathed in light even if it is freezing outside. It feels like a sun house.

**What's your house in Dubai like? What have you done to it to make it feel like a home?**

I've actually not done that much. It's a rental house: that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it! I'm fortunate to live in Jumeirah and what made me choose the house was that it was very bright. I guess a common trait in my houses is the natural light. We came with a lot of stuff from London and once we'd spread it through the house it kind of filled one room. So then we had to be creative. The current style is eclectic and charming. We've travelled a lot and as much as we're not hoarders we've kept mementos. These reflect who we are as a family. I've got classic antiques next to beautiful Ikea and recycled furniture that's been adapted and rejuvenated and reupholstered, stuff that's been with me for 20 years. It's definitely a home.

**As a designer, is it hard for you to resist making a more permanent mark on your home?**

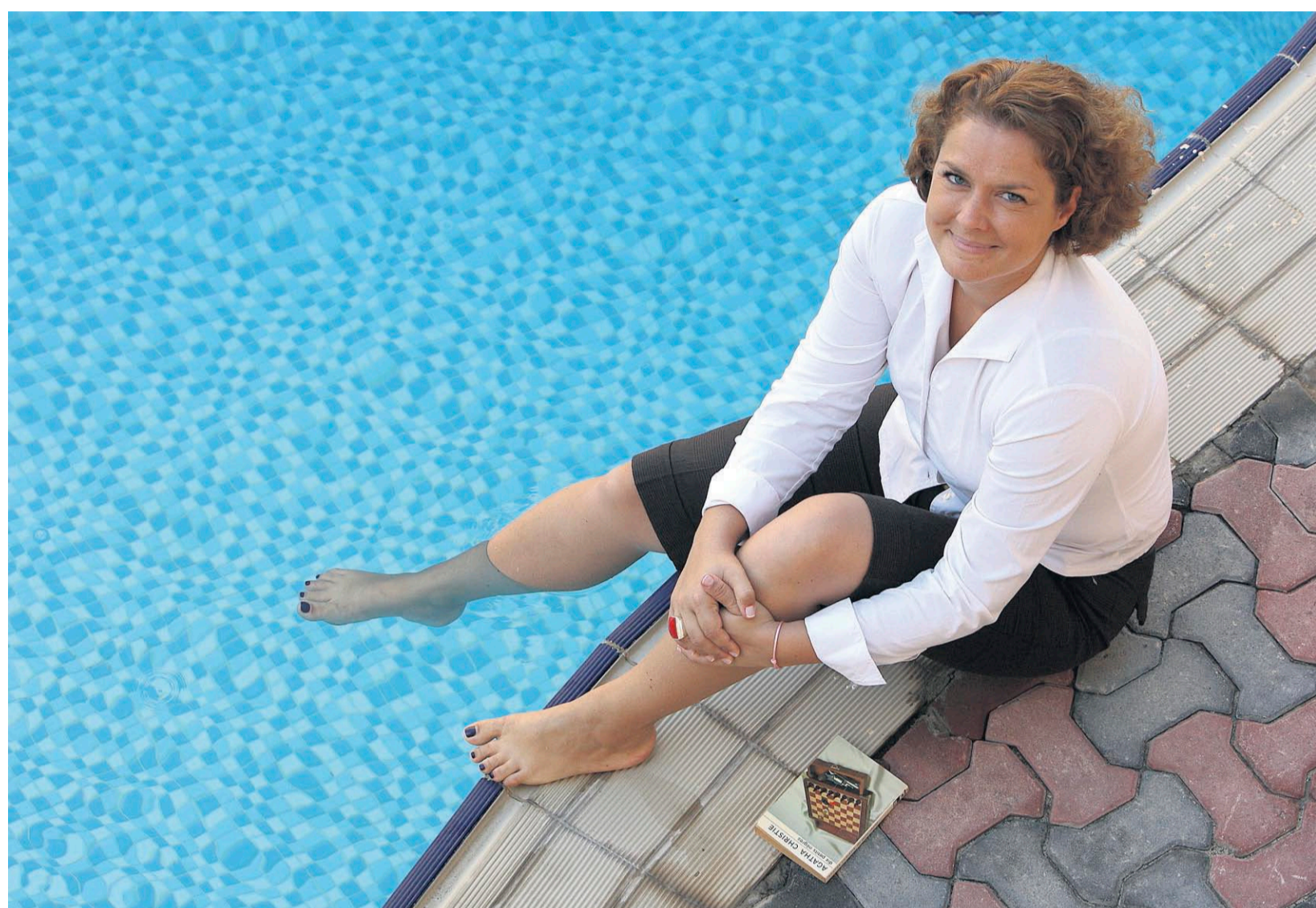
Dubai is very much transient, and that doesn't mean we can't invest, but often the sheer size of homes here precludes filling it. But I very much feel that it is OK to be in a state of flux. Everything is changing and nothing is frozen in time. There may be two rooms in the house that are 'finished' but we use those the most anyway. And the space allows for reinvention and temporary makeovers. I enjoy that a lot, and work permeates all aspects of life, and while I don't want to forget about work, I want it to work with me. I'll ring my husband at work and say let's have dinner in a particular room and we'll put something totally new together. For his birthday the first year we were here I redecorated the poolside and we had dinner there. It's like being away but you're at home.

**Has any home in your past had an influence on your choice of profession?**

The renovation in Ottawa was quite a trigger. It was fascinating to watch the architect reallocating spaces, to see things open up and spaces combine and redefine into something else. It is something that helped interest me in the process. I studied theoretical things, philosophy, but then decided I needed something more hands-on. That definitely directed me towards that, I love people and delving into their lives and various places.

**Do you enjoy the process of moving?**

I do like it. It's funny, my husband claims I like stability because I'm a Capricorn but that my rising Scorpio means I provoke change. I like stability but I do like to make changes in routine and move, in the end it is good exercise to go against the grain and do something challenging.



Marie-Noelle Swiderski, who believes a house must reflect the life and personality of its owner, at her home in Jumeirah, Dubai. Pawan Singh / The National

**Who has influenced your style of design?**

I studied under Andr e Putman in Paris, she's my hero. She practically invented the loft in the 1980s; that very pared down, minimalist style. It was quite stark and geometric at times, not really my personal style, but an amazing school in terms of how you define a space. At the opposite end, there was Daniel Brisset in Montreal; he did the prime minister's house and it was totally the other end of the scale, completely over the top, full-on gold. It took me through

the two extremes and then I found my home in Blanchard. Blanchard allowed me to define my own style and the eclecticism in my home, that's a pared down version of what you might see at Blanchard. We do classic contemporary that is timeless. As much as my home feels timeless, it's a home that moves with who we are, it's a home, not a monument.

**Which is more important to you in a home, its location or interior?**

Definitely internal spaces. The main thing for me is natural light

and light in general. The way you arrange lighting in any space will make or break it. I'm terrible, I physically cannot stay in a space where the lighting is wrong. I will rearrange lights at a party. Recently we had a bit of a tiff with an architect, he was adamant that the shell was more important than the interior. We said it was beautiful but it didn't correspond to how the client lives. The priority is you have to retain a human scale, a warmth and harmony with where people are, who they live with and how they are feeling. I think that is

why I would say people come into my home and think it's homely but doesn't look like a designer's home.

**What, above all, does home mean to you?**

It's a place to escape the world, a place to regroup. It's nice to be in that cocoon of home, its also an open, laid-back space where friends know they're always welcome. The key is to have people you love around you.

★ Jo Croft

## outdoors

## A jasmine by any other name...

The heady scented climbers adorn villa walls all over the UAE, writes Tom Duralia

*'Twas midnight – through the lattice, wreath'd*

*With woodbine, many a perfume breathed*

*From plants that wake while others sleep,*

*From timid jasmine buds, that keep Their odour to themselves all day,*

*But when the sunshine dies away, Let the delicious secret out*

*To every breeze that roams about;*

– Thomas Moore (1779-1852)

Ahh, jasmine, and given the context, this one just has to be poet's jasmine, or white jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*), that charming and sweetly perfumed climber of walls, arbours and arches from the gardens of the frost-free world. Then again, maybe it's Arabian jasmine (*J. sambac*), another night- and white-flowering climber with a heady scent and thousands of years of history.

But there are choices still, as "jasmine" is commonly applied to myriad fragrant vines and shrubs, regardless of their relatedness to the so-called "true jasmines" of the olive family and genus *Jasminum*, which itself contains an estimated 225-450 species, some scented, some not.

Here, for example, there are at least 12 readily found jasmines that will thrive on your trellises, and likely many more. From that dozen, seven are *Jasminums*, but

each of the five remaining species belong not only to different plant genera, but to different plant families (ie, they are not closely related at all). One of these, the Carolina jasmine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), has somehow gained distinction as a "false jasmine", maybe because its nectar and other bits are poisonous; not so good for jasmine tea. But such a beautiful vine, with its fragrant, buttery-yellow, orange-throated trumpets deserves better, and happily, it's still a common feature in gardens all over the world, as well as being the state flower of South Carolina.

Climbers of all kinds are a natural for the UAE, to adorn or spill over villa walls or other bits of the hard-scape, to provide much-needed shade, privacy, or as a cover-up for those less than desirable features of your property. And if, like many of the multi-tasking jasmines, those climbers happen to be bespeckled with beautifully scented snowflakes, stars or pinwheels, all the better. Here's the jasmine dozen, starting with the "true":

The poet's jasmine is probably the most commonly grown true jasmine in the Middle East and the rest of the world, and one of two species (the other *J. grandiflorum*) most important to the perfume and cosmetics industry. A hectare of flowers produces about 12 drops of oil, making jasmine one of the most expensive scents in the world, and the engine of a multibillion dirham industry in France. This species is sometimes slow to establish, but once started, it's a fast-grower (as are all the species discussed here),

so keep the pruners handy.

Arabian jasmine, mentioned above, is popularly grown as a houseplant or shrub, but it will climb or scramble given the opportunity. This is the jasmine of jasmine tea, and the national flower of both the Philippines and Indonesia. Arabian jasmine features clusters of sweet-scented white starflowers, each bloom about 2.5cm across, with some cultivars featuring fully-double flowers.

Royal jasmine (*J. grandiflorum*) is another nice one for your trellis. The occasionally red-edged, white, fragrant flowers are sometimes produced in delightfully dense clusters. Like all the *Jasminums* mentioned here, winter sun or partial sun is fine, but summer sun would be best confined to the morning. Similarly, don't let any of them dry out completely. To get it right, always discuss the specifics with your plant seller.

Angelwing jasmine (*J. nitidum*) is a fragrant night-bloomer featuring pink-tinted buds that unfold into snowy-white pinwheels up to 5cm across. The glossy leaves offer a fine contrast for the flowers.

South African jasmine (*J. angulare*) features sweet, but more delicately fragrant star-shaped flowers to 3cm across on a scrambling, evergreen vine.

Primrose jasmine (*J. mesneyi*) has bright yellow, long-blooming semi-double flowers (6-10 petals) borne on long, arching, cane-like branches. This species makes a great showing cascading over fences and walls.

Pink jasmine (*J. polyanthum*) is rose-pink in bud and on the outer

side of its fragrant white star-like flowers. This plant has been honoured a few times by the Royal Horticultural Society for its quick growth and ease of propagation among other things. But those same qualities have got it in trouble in parts of Australia and New Zealand where it can be an aggressive invader of forest understorey.

Red jasmine (*Quisqualis indica*) may be better known as Rangoon creeper. This colourful evergreen climber combines the jasmine scent with flowers that open to white, but within a few days change first to pink, then a deep crimson red.

Star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*), a slender vine and favourite of the American south, features perfumed pinwheel blossoms about 2.5cm across. This one is a star at clinging and clambering, and will climb practically anything unassisted.

Wild jasmine (*Clerodendrum inerme*) is a popular and tough evergreen vine/shrub with more sun, wind and salt and drought tolerance than the rest of the jasmines discussed here. It has attractively lush foliage and small fragrant white flowers accented by long, delicate purplish-red stamens.

The Carolina jasmine was discussed previously, leaving just one more species, this one with pale green undistinguished flowers, but a powerful enough scent to get the whole neighbourhood talking. The night-blooming jasmine (*Cestrum nocturnum*) has a perfume that may need some tempering through distance, so don't plant it too close to your patio.



There are at least 12 readily found jasmines that will thrive on your trellises, including pink jasmine, with its pink bud and white flower. iStockphoto.com