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Chateau chic in Dubai

A modern duplex on the Palm Jumeirah has been given a dramatic European makeover



By Charlotte Butterfield

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Classical furniture inside a Franco-Italian penthouse in Dubai. Styling by Sarah Maisey.

Source:Stefan Lindeque/ANM

Image 3 of 3

Stumbling upon an interior that wouldn't be out of place in a rambling Provençal chateau or Venetian villa is a surprise when you open the doors of this penthouse in the Fairmont Residences on the Palm.

Filled with classical reproductions and bespoke touches, the traditional European home is a world away from the contemporary facade of the building, after the previously modern space was overhauled completely.

The homeowner, who has properties across the world, is the CEO of a holding company.

He required a Dubai base for himself, his wife and their four children that made a grand statement. He envisioned an elegant, classical design that resonated a Franco-Italian theme and asked interior designer Alfred Johnson to transform the duplex penthouse.

"Our first step was to assess all of the family's requirements," Alfred says. "They wanted an open-plan living/dining area on the ground floor as well as an office and large kitchen that could provide ample storage for the family's daily demands. A mezzanine level houses the master bedroom and two children's bedrooms. We quickly worked out that the best colour scheme to maximise the sense of space and light was to have white as a base for each room, and then we layered additional accent colours on top in each space."

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The living/dining room has beautiful solid oak parquet flooring, accessorised with a bespoke platinum bronze 100 per cent silk rug that Alfred designed. It depicts a map of France within its delicate weave – a nod to the property's theme.

The walls and ceilings are adorned with custom-made mouldings, characteristic of French country houses during the Renaissance. Chocolate brown Chester Moon sofas by Baxter, and an Angelo Cappellini coffee table, consoles, mirror and dining suite complete the room.

Moving into the kitchen, the mood of the home shifts dramatically. Gone is the Rococo and Renaissance flair of the main living areas, and instead a beautifully sleek Poggenpohl kitchen with platinum wood and sand-coloured cabinets takes centre stage.

Hi-tech Miele appliances are both integrated into the walls and grace the granite worktops. This room has been restructured significantly; its previous incarnation was much smaller, which was simply not practical for a large growing family, so walls were demolished and the space reconfigured to create the practical, social kitchen it is now.

With access to the balcony and plunge pool, this room has now become the perfect lounging area for guests gathering around the marble-topped island counter.

On the mezzanine level, the master bedroom has a definite Parisian theme, helped along by the ornate Zanaboni bedroom furniture in white and gold.

The drapes are by Spanish firm Ultra, while the decadent 28-shade chandelier was custom designed by Alfred and manufactured by Patrizia Garganti in Italy. We love the custom-made bunk beds in the children's bedrooms. With a double lower bunk and wide wooden steps up to the top bunk, this is a great fusion of form and function.

By mixing designer brands such as Cappellini, Baxter, Linea Cali and Zanaboni with bespoke original items, the design blends the classic with the contemporary.

There's no denying the traditional European influences, but Alfred has ensured that the latest mod cons all have their place, too, by integrating a sophisticated home-automation system.

iPads and iPhones have complete control of the human-sensor security system, lighting, audio-visual and AC, which makes an interesting juxtaposition between the grandeur of yesteryear and the convenience of the 21st century.