

July 13 2011 | Last updated less than one minute ago

gulfnews.com

Life & Style | Home & Interiors

As Dubai as it Gets

Biomorphic, modern design finds a home when Alfred Johnson transforms this Dubai Marina penthouse into a high-life haven.

By Lena Moosa, Features Editor, InsideOut

Published: 00:00 October 1, 2010

InsideOut



Image Credit: Supplied

Nestled in the clouds above the Dubai Marina is a penthouse that embodies the Dubai dream. Sitting on the 53rd floor of Emirates Crown Tower, it sprawls over 7,800 square feet, offers five bedrooms, double lounges, eight bathrooms and glittering city

views.

Nestled in the clouds above the Dubai Marina is a penthouse that embodies the Dubai dream. Sitting high on the 53rd floor of Emirates Crown Tower, it sprawls over 7,800 square feet, offers five bedrooms, double lounges, eight bathrooms and the glittering city views. It (naturally) has the luxury of affluent ownership coupled with muted decadent tastes, allowing designer Alfred Johnson to go to town with the interiors.

The design is sparse but not minimal, overwhelming but not gaudy, each item within the apartment's interior proclaims designer, customised or bespoke rights. It speaks money without the tinsel.

Large entrance doors stamped with a solid brass motif warn you to brace yourself for a design explosion that will be nothing short of magnanimous. Grand is the order of the day and it is meant to blow your socks off. As you enter, it does.

Amid a hedonistic sensation of moody, club glam, the decor slowly unveils itself and individual elements come to the fore. Panelled wall cladding made with hand-moulded zebrano veneer greets you inside. A curiously detailed wall flows into the lounge space, weaving in and out, and creating a softly staggered effect. Its glossy, lacquered 12m zebrano veneer form a stunning landscape as natural light plays with its waves and folds. "This detail was inspired by looking at natural silk and how it falls when you roll it out," says Johnson. Its sheer size and manner appear as symbolic arms leading you into the final act - the formidable lounge space with full length glass that looks on to breathtaking views of the Palm and the city. "We crafted it to be 'art' rather than a structural necessity," says Johnson. "This wall was our way of paying homage to an art lover." The owners are avid collectors of art and had but one stipulation in the

brief: that the home be perpetually well designed and always resonating art.

Johnson describes himself as the brand and design language of Alfred Johnson Designs, a global luxury design firm with headquarters in Dubai. Their offices in Al Quoz are a maquette of their design style - organic shapes, intertwining elements, biomorphic architectural and design elements. You either love or hate it. At the very least, you will remain quizzical, but to not react to such design is unlikely.

Biomorphic design is their specialty, carving them a comfortable niche on the local design scene. Their award-winning Etisalat Dubai Festival City project brought them into the limelight. "We absolutely scored the market with our design language! No one had attempted to do such interiors before," says Johnson. The clients for this penthouse already had an idea of the company's specialty and design language. "When they walked into our offices, they took one look around, saw what we could do and said, 'that's it. We want to work with you. Now come up with something'," says Johnson.

As you walk past the entrance area, the main lounge sits to the right of the living space and Medusa, the pièce de résistance, takes centre stage. This dining table, Johnson proudly proclaims, is his personal handiwork. To the left is where the flowing wall culminates its curvilinear journey, at the bar - if you could call it that. Pulling all stops, Johnson's creative genius went beyond geometrics and into symbolism here, the result of which stood before us. Two oversized hands hold up a glowing slab of Egyptian alabaster onyx. "The bar was inspired by me putting my hands together," says Johnson. "This was our stamp on the design, a statement of us."

The penthouse was to serve as the owners' holiday home. They wanted earthy tones, however, not the white

that is the Alfred Johnson trademark, and they wanted the spaces to echo art.

Johnson describes the overall design ethos as biomorphic, über modernism melded with touches of classic contemporary. While you try to wrap your head around that, you realise that this penthouse itself is a design enigma with about 40 different finishes. The ceilings are kept deliberately glossy to work with reflection. Tons of LED lighting is creatively embedded into the walls and furnishings with reflective as well as matt furnishings below. The overall symphony created is mesmerising.

The bedrooms follow a zen-like, tranquil albeit luxury-based theme. Beiges and warm tones compliment the Burmese teak, ash wood and single strip walnut parquet. Oriental elements can be glimpsed through the broader design and the overall effect is that of a glorified spa. The walls of the living areas and bedrooms are covered in subtle and richly detailed Muraspec wallpaper, making a nice contrast with the bathrooms' cove LED strip lighting and white limestone, mirrors and emperoder marble top vanity counters. This home was the company's first residential project in the UAE, hence the need to genuinely create a showcase of their talent. The interiors offer a pure blend of surreal originality combined with Japanese-European themed spaces.

"Homes are driven by the emotion that they evoke, from the passion that designers put into it to the response that the first viewing emits." Having lived in several different places around the world, Johnson (rightfully) classes himself as a global citizen. "It's what you can do that matters not where you're from; it should be about your skill," he says. And this, he believes is what the brand Alfred Johnson is all about.