



# AEGEAN GRACEFULLY

A FAMILY HOME ON THE GREEK ISLAND OF SYROS IS MASTERFULLY EXECUTED IN A PARED-BACK HELLENIC STYLE THAT MAKES THE MOST OF ITS LOCATION

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ABOVE, FROM LEFT A dried-reed pergola provides shade for the outside dining area of this home in Greece; the home's three levels maximise the views; crochet pieces were sourced from Tresoz in Athens

There are some design languages that, because they have become so ubiquitously present and, as a result, so completely removed from any semblance of verisimilitude, to work within them is near impossible without the clear and present danger of descending into the

painfully kitsch. Think Tuscan villas in Midrand or, more appropriately here, the traditional Hellenic aesthetic: whitewashed walls, royal-blue shutters, rickety chairs in an assortment of punchy hues and profusions of bougainvillea. These have become the things of Zorba-the-Greek themed hangovers, the cornerstones of the almost criminally dilettantish 'taverna chic'. ▶





The home's exterior blends effortlessly into its surrounds RIGHT Perforated metallic pendants by Love Light cast fantastic shadows in the dining room OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM ABOVE The minimalist kitchen; relaxed decorating in the lounge



## 'THE GREEK AESTHETIC IS ONE THAT HAS GROWN OUT OF PRACTICAL NEEDS'

*Sotiris Tsergas*

Mercifully here, on the southwest coast of the Greek island of Syros, you'll find none of that sort of thing. Apollonian in its rationality, the structure is expressed in clean geometry while still retaining subtle nods to classic Cycladic design tropes, such as a simplification of linearity and a rough-finish look that speaks of hands-on craftsmanship. 'We were profoundly influenced by the location, from the

warm colours of the earth to the shifting blues of the Mediterranean Sea. The outcome was a modern house with a traditional, very local influence,' says architect Sotiris Tsergas of Athens-based firm Block722 who, along with his interior designer wife Katja Margaritoglou, were tasked with overseeing the entire project, from design and build to decorating. The homeowners, Greek expatriates, wanted

to create a convivial holiday escape where friends and family alike could gather, enjoying the bountiful sunshine and fresh produce of the Med.

'The Greek aesthetic is one that has grown out of practical needs,' says Sotiris, explaining how, with the right understanding and execution, the hackneyed visual cues that we've come to associate with oh-so-Greek Greek

design can be returned to a sense of purposefulness. The bright, white walls are used to reflect the strong sun and help the house remain cool, while pergolas woven with dried reeds do more than evoke a sun-dappled Shirley Valentine kind of romance but actually provide much needed pockets of shade.

From the onset it was clear that the build's primary focus would be the

unmatched views across the Aegean and, as Sotiris notes, it was very much a careful process of trial and error that required hours at the site, moving between plateau levels figuring out the best way to take full advantage of the home's outlook. 'You'd commonly build a high-standing volume in the hopes of getting maximum views, but following that process means you also end up including some undesirable ▶





The mirrors in the bathroom are by Barous Studio OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT Cool linen and cotton were used in the bedroom; concrete was a natural, hard-wearing choice for the build

elements in the picture that you might want to rather exclude,' he says. 'In the end, we went about it completely the opposite way: putting the main house on ground level with a sunken pool lounge on a lower step and then an even lower infinity pool that seems to become one with the sea and sky.'

With the views secured, Sotiris went about establishing the house through

a clever use of 'basic, raw-looking materials' that age well (they would, after all, be subject to some curmudgeonous elements such as blistering heat, strong winds and pounding rain that are par for the course with coastal living) and required little maintenance. 'We wanted the house to blend into its surrounds, so we used natural materials that were both a pleasure to look at but were also

engaging on a tactile level, where some parts of the house are very smooth and others quite rough,' he explains.

'The interior process is something that, for us, is not separate from the architecture,' says Katja, who mediated the seamless integration between the decor and the home's physical structure. 'We often speak of how a material or object expresses itself as part of the whole

rather than in isolation. It's a constant balancing act between keeping with the minimal, clean lines and creating a feeling of warmth and cosiness.' So she went about enlisting the skills of local artisans to imbue the home with a similar sense of belonging, that intangible feeling of having always been there. To achieve this, says Katja, only custom pieces would do. Door handles throughout were cast

in bronze by artist Pantelis Chandris, who also created the traditional motifs on the entrance doors, while crochet beanbags, cushions and umbrellas were sourced at Trezos, a small workshop in Athens.

Sotiris and Katja's honesty-is-the-best-policy approach has paid off. 'All you need is the sun, the sea and the sky,' muses Sotiris. 'That's what it means to be Greek.' ■

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