

THE LUXURY OF WANDERLUST

*While completing her latest project in Dubai, Katharine speaks to **Anna Brady** about how she runs her global business, the Middle Eastern market and creating interiors that tell a story*



Interior designer Katharine Pooley in the villa she designed on Dubai's Palm Jumeirah. The cabinet is a bespoke piece, made with FSC certified Satin Figured Anigre veneer. Katharine wears: white top, Dhs2,765, gold top, Dhs8,035, and trousers, Dhs3,770, all Roland Mouret; shoes, Dhs2,076, Stuart Weitzman



On the landing of the Dubai villa, sits this sculptural table, formed from the branch of a Redwood tree with lapis lazuli inset into the top, from London boutique Patrick Mavros

At the tip of a frond on Dubai's Palm Jumeirah is a hive of activity. In a newly built villa, all floor-to-ceiling glass windows taking in the reflected light of the Arabian Gulf and sweeping view of Dubai's Marina, workmen bustle around putting final touches to the property's bespoke interiors. The fridge is stocked, the nursery bursting with

everything a child could wish for (two giraffes included). Even the photo frames, specifically designed for this home, are carefully placed on shelves, already containing a family's memories.

Amidst all this arrives the woman at the helm, interior designer, Katharine Pooley. All smiles, she is entirely unfazed by juggling our photoshoot with hundreds of contractors and craftsmen requiring her approvals on the finishing of the five bedroom villa before it is handed over to its owners, Amit and Jolanta Patel, two days later. This would send most of us into a frantic flap, but it's all in a day's work for Katharine, a natural multi-tasker who relishes a challenge.

Although now London based, Katharine grew up in Bahrain, where her mother has lived for 42 years and, she says, sitting in the open plan reception room, a make-up artist attempting to apply lipstick between answers, "I

first came to Dubai years ago when, well, it was sand."

Although Katharine, her husband and two children live in Chelsea, with homes in Oxfordshire and Scotland, much of her life is spent on a plane; some 70 per cent of her projects are overseas and of that, around 70 per cent are in the Middle East. She casually reels off, "right now we have four projects in Dubai, four in Doha, two in Kuwait, three in Saudi, two in Oman and two in Washington." The company also has a boutique and office in Doha and recent projects in the Middle East include a vast four floor property in Kuwait, housing its owners' collection of Eastern antiquities. Her first completed project in Qatar was a 10,000 square foot home in West Bay, Doha, shown on these pages, which like many of Katharine's projects featured the work of both British and local Qatari craftsmen, including bespoke joinery, chandeliers and furniture, all glistening verre églomisé finishes (a trademark Pooley touch) and hand embroidered upholstery and cushions.

Like many successful interior designers, Katharine has no formal training, but she doesn't feel that hinders her. "I want to come across humble when I say this, but I think you're either born with taste or not," she says, "I was very lucky in that my step-mother had very good taste. She was an interior designer and the house was always very beautifully laid out. Different, it was very chintzy actually in those days, but obviously I learnt the art of beautiful things."

In fact, Katharine's background is in finance; 16 years at Morgan Stanley in Hong Kong, Singapore and Vietnam. But that business background is imperative for running her company today. "One of my clients said she came to me as an interior designer not because it was about having great taste, although of course it is about

In the sitting room of the Palm villa, the architectural lighting was commissioned by Sally Storey for John Cullen. The bespoke decorative chandelier by Lasvit is hand-made from Czech crystal. The diptych of paintings beyond is by Brendan Burns, represented by Osborne Samuel gallery in London

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On the terrace of the villa, the bronze sculpture, titled *Circle of Life*, is by Renaud Lazard and was sourced by Katharine in France. The sunbeds are by McKinnon and Harris and the chairs by Minotti

The April White marble, a Branco Macaubas Quartz, for this guest bathroom was sourced in Italy. The mirror is again a bespoke piece by Katharine Pooley, manufactured in London by Patrick Ireland



The wooden piece behind the bed in one guest room of the Palm villa was made by Barn in the City and incorporated into a bespoke joinery piece installed by the Katharine Pooley team. The headboard is in Holly Hunt fabric and the resin corals on the shelves are from Kelly Hoppen



This chair by Tatiana Tafur, in one of Katharine Pooley's projects in Doha, is gilded in silver leaf



In this project in Doha, the dining table and chairs were designed by the Katharine Pooley team and manufactured in London and Italy. The chandelier is by Haberdashery Ltd and designed with the team for the client

Below: Interior designer Katharine Pooley. Blue shirt, Dh\$1,025, Victoria Beckham; trousers, Dh\$3,310, Simone Rocha at Symphony; jacket, Dh\$6,005, Roland Mouret; shoes, Dh\$2,334, Stuart Weitzman



having a good eye, but because so much is about dealing with management, marketing, staffing, pricing, finances," she says, matter of fact, "I think the structure and the discipline of working long hours at a company like Morgan Stanley, being in difficult situations, being a diplomat, coping with different cultures, is so important."

Her business and background might be international, but Katharine's 'just get on with it' attitude is decidedly British. Her shift from Excel to paint charts came quite by accident, after she moved to Singapore when she got married and she and her husband bought four properties around the world to renovate, in America, Thailand, Scotland and London. "I personally did up four different houses on four different continents, which probably sounds quite easy now but in those days, everyone was like 'whoa'" says Katharine. But she loved it. "I think when you're passionate and you love something, you work very hard. There were times that I would go through an entire night without sleeping, and I'd probably do one of those a week. It's a drive isn't it, when you love something like that?"

A steep learning curve, her mistakes taught her resourcefulness. One project was a 15th century castle in remote Scotland. "Everything had to

be shipped up. I didn't think about it but the spiral staircase goes left way round rather than right way round. I couldn't get one single piece of furniture up, so I had to saw everything in half and clamp it together. So the great thing is no one will be able to pinch anything, as they won't be able to get any of the furniture out."

Interiors didn't become a business until she transferred back to the UK in 2004, and opened a shop on Walton Street in London. An inveterate traveller – "It's who I am, you take travel away from me and I die. It's my spirit" – she stocked it with her finds from across the world, either original or designs inspired by them. "I thought I'd open that, get a shop manager and pop in every now and again for tea and enjoy life," she remembers, "Well I never got the tea, I've just worked non-stop for the last 13 years." After visiting the shop one day, Mohammed Al Fayed, then the owner of Harrod's, asked her to design one of his homes. Today her global business has a staff of 40.

With a new project, says Katharine, to get to know the client they "ask thousands of questions - what do you want to achieve from the house, what do you like what don't you like?" She never goes on their existing home however, "because that is just what they don't want." Stylistically, Katharine and her team (who she is ever quick to credit) are chameleons; there's no 'house-look' because, as Katharine says, "It's not about me, it's about the client and the house." At a push she describes the Katharine Pooley aesthetic as "Quality, timeless and... detailed. Layered." As a result, her own homes are, "very confused. Because every time I do a new project I want to change them. I love every style, which causes my husband to get quite frustrated with me as my continuous inspiration makes for regular changes in our home!"

The Palm villa is the fourth property she has done for

the owner, and it's a very different style to the others. "We've just done his castle in England which is all deep reds and chocolate browns and leathers, but that's for a castle," she says, "It's not just the client that speaks to us, it's the house. This particular house is very bright, it's surrounded by light blue seas, so we've brought those tones inside. The carpet is cream though, because the sun is so strong a blue one would be bleached to grey. Our job is to not only help the client but to help the house, so the house tells a story." Katharine thinks being married and a mother helps to understand the compromises necessary between a couple and between adults and children when designing a home - doing children's playrooms and buying all the toys is one of her favourite parts of the job. In this project, the study and cinema room, far darker and more masculine than the rest of the house, have been designed with Amit in mind, whereas downstairs it's much more fresh and light.

The villa took just over a year to complete, the entire contents meticulously planned in the UK and shipped out in ten 40 foot containers. Much here has been made by Katharine's trusted craftsmen - British joiners who fly out to install their work. Quality is paramount - they will never buy from China, although many rugs are from Nepal and large shellwork pieces (such as the glistening wall of mother of pearl in the master bathroom) are brought in from the Philippines because that is where the best work can be found.

Quality has been something lacking in many of the city's rapidly constructed buildings but Katherine thinks that's changing. "In Dubai I think they've realised they built things too quickly, too cheaply. I think people left after the recession and now they're coming back again." Kuwait, however, she considers a pioneer of interior design in the Gulf. "The houses are just perfect inside. More classical in style, but I believe now they are changing and favouring more of a contemporary and clean line look," she gestures around, "Dubai is much younger and more beachy."

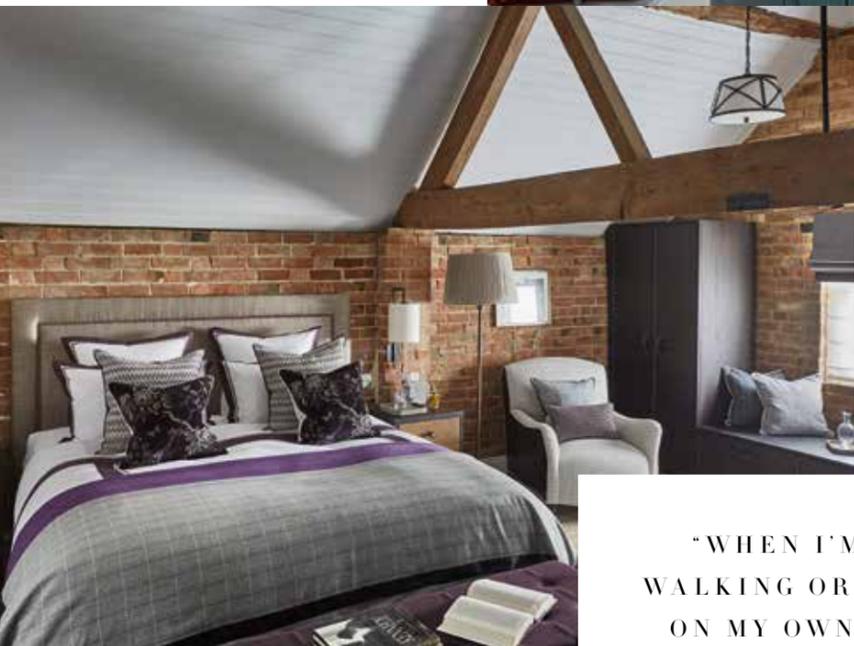
All around the Palm villa are carefully placed objets, creating little vignettes, playing on textures, form and shape. There's much iridescent shell work, soft chalky surfaces of ceramics juxtaposed with warm metallics, and curvaceous forms that borrow from the sea outside; this



In the same Doha project, armchairs by Amy Somerville sit alongside a sofa and coffee table designed by the Katharine Pooley team and manufactured in London and Italy

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A guest bedroom in Buckinghamshire, designed by Katharine Pooley



The Chalon kitchen of the Buckinghamshire country home designed by Katharine Pooley

is coastal living, luxe. Such personal, considered dressing (even the blackboard in the playroom has a message welcoming its new incumbent), is part of the Pooley service. This is not just milk in the fridge when you arrive, it's a fully stocked freezer and a pair of slippers awaiting wearing feet.

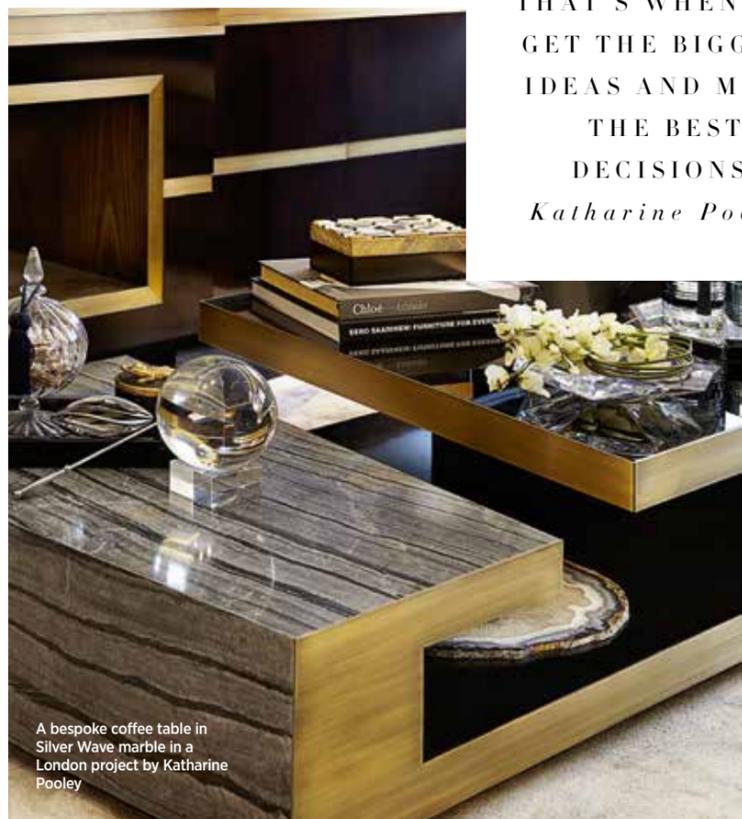
"A lot of our clients have multiple homes," says Katharine, "They have the income, they just don't have the time. So if you take this house, I have 12 of my people here right now, can you imagine how long it would take you to do that yourself?" She gestures to a cushion, "For instance, I've done cushions that have a different front, different back, piping and embellishment from four different suppliers. Just for a cushion."

Something that recurs again and again are specialist finishes, juxtapositions of rough and smooth, the sleek and the rustic. Upstairs there's innovative wood work from Barn In The City, such as the headboard on one bed made from old timbers, then gilded and set within resin. The walls in the main reception area are not painted, they are polished plaster with a slight iridescence. The latter as a replacement for paint is a trend that Katharine has noticed this year, along with a renewed penchant for wallpaper. "In terms of colours, blush pink and antique bronze are still here although people are now using a lot more nickel," she continues, "Not so much gold, more bronze. And emerald green is really coming in. An emerald green sofa, say. Some people are even using it on their walls."

Practicalities of running a business aside, Katharine is still a creative so when, among all this globetrotting and problem solving, does she have time to think freely? She laughs, "I used to climb mountains, and the funny thing is, when you're walking for eight hours a day, you talk to yourself. When you're living your everyday life, you don't have time to think. When I'm walking or I'm on my own or I'm on an aeroplane, that's when you get the biggest ideas and make the best decisions."

Having spent so much time looking at the interior of a plane it's perhaps no surprise that top of her bucket list for future projects is a private jet. "I'd love to do another big yacht and I'd love to do a plane, there's so much to consider, constraints of weight, space," she grins, "A real challenge." Then again, whether climbing a mountain, riding across the Sahara on horseback or, perhaps, kitting out a plane, the intrepid Katharine Pooley seems most at home when faced with a challenge. ■

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A bespoke coffee table in Silver Wave marble in a London project by Katharine Pooley



"IT'S NOT JUST THE CLIENT THAT SPEAKS TO US, IT'S THE HOUSE"
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In the Palm villa, Katharine Pooley sits beside a coffee table she designed specifically for the house. The pigment is pure burnt orange, reminiscent of the sand dunes found in the Al Khatim Desert, and the piece was inspired by the client's Dale Chihuly artwork hung in the same space (not shown). Dress, Dhs2,695, Temperley London; shoes, Katharine's own

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