

MUNSTER INTERIORS



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SOUTH-SPECIFIC STYLE

Spring 09

AFRIC HAMILTON DISCOVERS A STUNNING SEAFRONT SANCTUARY WHERE FENG SHUI AND INTERIOR DESIGN PRINCIPLES HARMONIOUSLY COMBINE TO CREATE DIFFERENT SPACES FOR DIFFERENT MOODS. PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MIKI BARLOK**.

When I arrived to meet the interior designer of this fabulous home situated on the waterside in Ring, I rang the doorbell and heard chimes that resonated throughout the large (3,500 square foot) house. Nina Kati, who was selected from over 600 designers to participate in RTE's Showhouse programme, was commissioned to design the house from scratch. *"The client saw my work on TV and booked me two weeks later,"* she says. She became involved in the two and a half year project before the first brick was laid. "It was great, because it meant I could make some interior changes to the design of the house while it was being built," she says. The client, 'a single guy,' gave Nina carte blanche with the design, "but I still went back and checked every detail with him," she says.

While not devoid of feminine touches, the decor is clearly designed with an emphasis on neutrality. Nina first showed me the kitchen, which is a chef's dream. The design is deceptively simple, but all the equipment is state-of-the art Bosch, Gaggenau or Neff. Instead of everything being tucked away in drawers, there are suspension rails for hanging utensils mounted on the splash-back over the cooking station and food preparation area. Spice and canister racks are also to hand. Everything is visible, aesthetic, and accessible.

On entering the kitchen, the immediate striking feature is the granite marble worktop flecked with rubies. "The marble is from India. I was thrilled when I found out!" says Nina, whose father is Indian. The kitchen is light, airy and spacious, with plenty of worktop space. There is no dining room because the client particularly wanted the dining to take place in the kitchen. So the second main feature here is the dining table, which is also marble-topped. "I bought the table, had the top removed, and had a marble top made." Nina is partial to the French Ligne Roset range and selected their dining chairs because they come with dry-cleanable or washable covers. "They're fabulous. The fabric is a micro-fibre, similar to suede," she says.

Going only for the best, Nina chose a Neff oven, warming drawer and steam oven, Manhattan coffee maker, and the gorgeous Gaggenau ceramic hobs and customised *teppan yaki* hot plate. "This is a very healthy way to cook, as the food requires very little oil and is cooked at a high temperature in its own juices," says Nina. She was also very pleased with the Gaggenau downdraft extractor fans, which mean you don't have to have intrusive overhead oven hoods. "You wouldn't believe the suction," she says. "And it's got an exterior motor, so you aren't affected by the noise." Nina's designs always incorporate the principles of harmony and balance.

balance & harmony

"In Feng Shui terms, the kitchen is the fire centre of the house. It can get really busy and frenetic when people are cooking. So I really needed to create a calmer level." She achieved this by using subtle shades on the walls. "The room is very spacious, so I could also bring in a darker colour at either end to bring the room in and warm it a little. If the colours work, everything works." While her brief was to keep things neutral, Nina did add some feminine touches. "I tried to find natural things – such as the limed wicker window box with dried and tied scented lavender," she says. The kitchen is very bright and it also needs privacy, so Nina chose voiles with a Japanese print, adding the final ornamentation by hand herself. "I got those off some napkin rings," she laughed. "It was cheaper to do that than to buy the decorations separately. Also, whenever I was out on the beach, I'd collect shells."

As well as her attention to the smallest details (such as an Insinkerator for disposing of organic waste), Nina also focuses on the subtleties of lighting. Over the table hang onion-shaped crystal lights. For the dresser, she got delicate, sophisticated lights that could be left on 'in case anyone needed to nip into the kitchen during the night.' The lights also effectively illuminate the ornamental large glass jars filled with seashells or dried coloured pasta.

The entrance is fresh, and spacious with unusual cable lights that drop from a high ceiling. Directly in front of the entrance is a solid oak staircase with glass panelling along the banisters. The combination of light, metal and wood is very harmonious. "I wanted to get a sense of a sculptural space," says Nina. And she did.

Other elegant touches I noted were the Cadiz shell in the guest cloakroom and the flower candles in a gold embossed glass jug. "Here I was aiming for an inviting space that was not too formal," says Nina. One element of the design process was selecting the artwork, which Nina really enjoyed. The art was sourced professionally, and there is an emphasis on exciting landscapes, to bring in a suggestion of the superb views outside. Many of the paintings are large with interesting, unexpected colours. There are three reception rooms, an informal living room, for watching TV, listening to music, reading and relaxing, a sitting

room with large fireplace for conversation, entertaining and cosy nights in, and a conservatory – my favourite room – which is energising and light, a morning room.

In the living room, a sliding panel hides the TV and music system when not in use. There is also an extended sofa with a curved end and foot rest. "Most people don't sit, they lounge. So this is very inviting," says Nina.

Moving from the calming green tones of the living room to the sudden brightness of the conservatory is quite exciting. "Because the house is so big, I wanted each space to be different, for different moods," says Nina. The views from the conservatory are stunning at night, she tells me. Here, the spectacular circular ceiling feature – the client's choice – is a specially designed Catherine wheel, showing stars that light up at night, using alternating white and blue LED lights. Directly below it is a circular strawberry-red wool rug. The effect is mesmerising.

The more formal sitting room is also more masculine, with a leather suite and interestingly matched leaf-patterned Ottoman. An impressive wall-mounted French solid fuel stove with polished black granite hearth forms the focus for this room. What I also like here is the way Nina displays briquettes in a rectangular wicker basket, and chopped wood in a large basket in the corner.

Downstairs, we find the second real surprise, design-wise. The office space is a vision of whiteness, where a bowl of yellow tulips adds movement and a sense of nature. The glass-topped white desk is placed to the front, facing towards the back door, where the sun shines in, creating a magic quality. Also downstairs is the large en-suite master bedroom, where the dramatic element is the sumptuous bed linen and tall silkscreen headboard. "I went to Dunnes, bought loads of cushions, took off the ornaments, and sewed them onto the headboard," says Nina "And the trimming as well." The result is really a fabulous, unique piece. The colours chosen for this room were aubergine and gold, adding to the luxurious ambience.

An added touch of luxury is the sauna in the large dressing room, with seats sociably facing each other. The en-suite bathroom also features a luxury spa bath with double head rests, coloured underwater lights, and a waterfall bath filler.

In the upstairs bedrooms on the third floor, the theme of the tall headrests continues, again with Nina's artfully creative use of the decorations on Dunnes Stores cushions. The first bedroom is quite feminine, in silk and subtle pink. The next bedroom is turquoise and gold, while the third guest bedroom is blue and rose – Nina's colour combinations are certainly unusual, possibly influenced by her exotic background. She was born in Uganda, and is half-Indian, half-Irish. She is also widely travelled and has lived in several countries, so her influences are many and varied. She sums up her design style as calm, elegant and desirable, and has clearly accomplished that goal here. *"This has been the most exciting and challenging project I've ever worked on, and as a joint effort between designer and client, I've derived great satisfaction from our achievements,"* she says. "I feel most fortunate to have met and worked with such a kind and generous client."

Nina has certainly made an impact with this home. "I don't just transform people's homes, I transform their lives," she promises, and judging from what I've seen here, I believe she lives up to that promise.

Q&A

What's your favourite room?

The kitchen. I like the fact that it's got balance. It's not just a kitchen, it's a reception room. And also, the appliances were chosen with healthy living in mind. I put the most effort into this room, and I'm very pleased with the double blinds, the granite, the display cabinet, the harmony of the room. It's also the most complete room.

What's your favourite piece?

There is so much in this house that I love. But I think my favourite piece is the double-ended Jacuzzi bath, and the way it sits with the tiles. I love all its features, the underwater lighting, the waterfall, and head rests. But if I were to choose a piece of furniture, it would be the white gloss wall-hung drinks cabinet and its matching floating shelves in the conservatory.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

I think I would have changed the curtains in the entrance lobby. They were chosen purely for budget reasons and because they were low priority.

What advice would you give to people trying to recreate this look?

If you do your research you can possibly find substitutes for a lot of the expensive pieces. I do a lot of traipsing before buying. I also sit down and go through reference materials, catalogues and magazines before deciding on a scheme. When you are focused on an interior design project, your antennae are up and you can imprint an impression of what you want in your mind. Just one item can be the basis for a theme.

What key fundamentals inspired your approach to the interiors of this house?

The key fundamental was a soft look, even with hard furniture and flooring. I aimed to blend these for clarity and balance.

When selecting the artwork, did you choose the painting or the artist?

You can't plan art in advance. So in most cases it was the piece that grabbed my attention. Sometimes I make a room deliberately bland so that the art can make more of a dramatic impact. I go to small galleries, like Joan Clancy Art Gallery in Ring, or the Private Collector's Gallery in Inishannon, also the Cork Art Show, the RDS. Sometimes I've heard of the artist, sometimes not. For example, this house features art by Die Peters, John Cullinane, Paul Fallon, Blawnin Clancy, Reagan from Clonakilty, Ross Steward. Some are well known, others aren't. So it's about the piece. Often once you install an original piece of art it gives you the inspiration for a clearly defined concept. ✨

INTERIOR DESIGN: Nina Kati, Working Wonders, T: 051 646273, M: 086 812 6730, W: www.workingwonders.ie, E: info@workingwonders.ie

Working Wonders was responsible for:

- Redesign of rooms
- Kitchen/utility design and joiner's specs
- Bathroom designs/fittings and suppliers' specs
- Tile designs and tilers' specs
- Lighting designs and electricians' specs
- Plumbing plans and plumbers' specs
- Conservatory ceiling feature design and design for concealment of pipes
- Design of both staircases
- Design of all headboards and framing
- Design of some furniture (dresser/cube unit, sitting/living room suites, etc.)
- Design for wall mounted furniture in conservatory
- Design and fit-out of walk-in wardrobes
- Built-in wardrobes design and spec for joiner
- Selection of all interior doors (solid oak) and architectural mouldings (Door linings, glass panes, skirtings, architraves, sills and door furniture)
- Design of 3 chimney breasts and research/selection of wall mounted stoves
- Selection and sourcing of all fixtures, fittings, furniture
- Soft furnishings incl upholstery, towels, bathrobes, bed linen, table linen
- Design/selection of window treatments incl trimmings (some hand sewn)
- Interior décor and decorators' spec
- Flooring, incl all trims for doorways and carpet mats specially sized/edged
- Hand selection of tiles, mosaics and wood flooring lengths prior to laying
- Sourcing artwork, framing, objects d'art and all finishing touches