

HELLO!

MIDDLE EAST

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COLOMBIAN FIRECRACKER
MONICA DUROU
LIVING THE DUBAI DREAM
IN HER CHARMING CASITA



BLACKOUT ON THE GOLDEN GLOBE RED CARPET



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COLOMBIAN FIRECRACKER
MONICA DUROU
THE INTERIORS QUEEN TELLS ALL ABOUT
LIVING THE DUBAI DREAM IN HER
FABULOUS FOUR-BEDROOM CASITA

She's used to inevitable comparisons with Colombia's A-list silver screen star Sophia Vergara, but is still tickled by the compliment when we mention it.

Yet, with her tumbling brunette locks and ease-in-front-of-the-camera, not to mention her infectious uproarious laughter that continues throughout our shoot in her Jumeirah villa, this Colombian native has not just the *Modern Family* lead's va-va-voom looks, but also her entrepreneurial drive.

The 32-year-old is the co-founder of interior design boutique, C'est Ici, and her home is the perfect calling card for her discerning eye.

A chic, pared down palette of whites, cream and beige that wouldn't be out of place in a pretty Provençal space – a nod perhaps to her

French husband – are punctuated with bold canvases celebrating her South American heritage.

The bubbly mum-of-two welcomed **HELLO!** into her home to talk about her vivacious French-Colombian family, her mentoring mama and her desire to constantly declutter.

The UAE is across the world from your native Colombia – what brought you here?

It was 2008, quite a significant year. I married my French beau, finished my law degree and moved to Dubai, all in the same year.

We had been living in London for more than seven years and it was the right time to move somewhere warmer. My husband, Emmanuel, is a strategy consultant and he ▶



'Our main aim was to create a home and warm space reflecting both our origins and our style'

was asked to open an office in Dubai. We came to visit, and it was a 'yes, yes and yes'. I was about to do a training contract, but we both followed our instincts and decided to start this new adventure. We planned to come for a year; nine and a half years later and here we are, with two beautiful boys Matheo, three, one-year-old Gabriel, and Mimosa, our adorable Westie.

You used to work in the legal field, was it intimidating to leave that world behind you to

go into interior design?

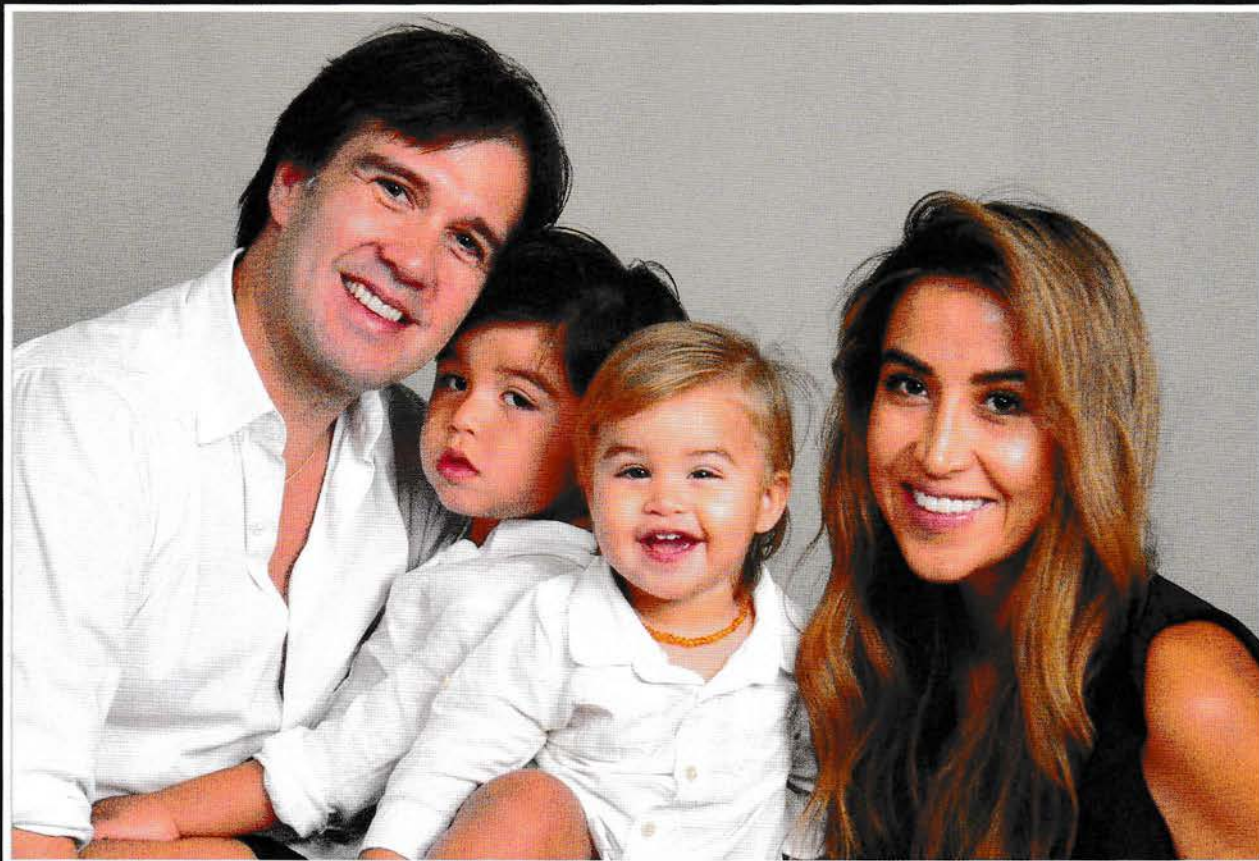
I think life is all about choices and opportunities. My life has changed dramatically in the last 10 years; my boys and husband came along and my priorities changed. I had been working for the last nine and a half years in the corporate world, and since our family expanded, I have been more inspired in crafting a home.

Tati, my partner in crime and co-founder of C'est Ici came along, and completed the recipe.

Did I feel a scared? Yes, but not about quitting my job, but about making this new journey and for the right reasons. My motto is 'my family and love for life'! I believe that our surroundings play a crucial role in our daily mood.

What first attracted you to this villa?

When we first landed in Dubai, we lived in a lovely two-bedroom apartment in Marina Promenade; we both loved the young vibe and made great memories in that



No corner is left unadorned in this two-storey villa



apartment. However, at the time we were thinking about expanding the family, we both worked at DIFC and it was a pretty long commute, so we decided to look for villas in Jumeirah. This villa was pretty much love at first sight. It just felt right from day one; like home. One of the things we fell in love with was the location, at the heart of Dubai and the modern yet classic design.

At the time, we didn't have kids, so it was hard to convince my modest Frenchie that we actually needed a four-bedroom villa. Well, I played my Colombian tricks and we signed the lease after the second visit.

Did you have to do a lot to this house when you moved into it?

Well, from a structural point of view, the villa was impeccable. One of the things we fell in love with was the open-plan layout.

In terms of interior decoration and styling, we started from scratch. It has been a long-term project. At first we focused on our bedroom and entertaining areas. We started with the larger items and kept them simple. A nice comfortable sofa in a neutral colour will always be in style, so we started with that as our foundation and then incorporated more fun, trendy pieces with a mix of rustic and boho items to round it off.

We repainted all the walls, sticking to lighter tones; we both love petroleum blue and made a statement wall. Our outdoor area has been one of the biggest projects – we completely transformed the space and converted this to a boho-zen area in the middle of the city. This is my favourite space to disconnect from the routine.

Between oldies but goodies, treasures from our past and travels, we started to build our home. The kids came, and my passion for styling and décor came to life.

I remember sending proposals to my husband with the layout, budget, patterns, style and everything involved in the making of both of our boys' rooms. He was rather impressed, it was tough for him to say no after all the effort I'd put in. He ►

**'My motto is "my family
and love for life"!'**



Mirrors and reflective surfaces are employed to great effect and give a sense of space in this home that Monica and Emmmanuel share with their two young sons (top left)

'A clean, layered look was our goal. We focused on a "less is more" approach'



suggested I do something with styling and decorating. He has been my number-one fan.

What factors were uppermost in your mind? Foremost as expats, our main aim was to create a home and warm space reflecting both our origins and our style.

I could define my style as rustic and bohemian with contemporary touches. I love basics in neutral colours and, above all, versatile options that you can mix with each other. A clean, layered look was definitely our goal. We focused on a 'less is more' approach. We both love blue sea colour palettes, lattes and creamy colours.

We both love to reinvent and upgrade existing furniture – partly because I have to negotiate with my husband quite a lot when it comes to spending, so reinventing something seems a little bit less expensive than buying a new piece.

With time, we added final layers to each room with art, textiles and accessories. Those can easily be swapped out and exchanged through the years to keep your room feeling fresh. When the kids came along, we reinvented our style for a safer and practical look, but we stick to our roots, something that we love as they are now used to respect our space, and it still looks chic!

What was your greatest interior extravagance?

Our living room was the result of a football deal! It was 2014, Matheo, my oldest son was only six weeks old. My husband is a football fanatic and he desperately wanted to go to Brazil for the World Cup. First answer was 'No way, José!' Then he said he would redo the whole living room. He knew my soft spot so in the end I said yes!

Can you tell us what your signature style is interiors-wise?

I am absolutely obsessed with wood and reinvented versions of wood incorporated into contemporary pieces. Whether through textures, embroidery or prints, I also like to add bold, striking and colorful pieces for final touches, to spice up the space.

I use a lot of greenery. I was brought up in Colombia in a beautiful house built by my parents from scratch. Our Bogotá house was surrounded by Rosales' forest, in the heart of the city. Botanicals remind me of my origins.

You need to create a home; we live in a world full of trends. We should focus on what makes us happy not what is trendy.

Do you have any touches from Bogotá here? We Colombians are proud citizens. The Carthaginian ladies artwork we found on one of our travels, gives the colour and light we wanted in our living room. It reminds me of my culture and roots.

Another Colombian touch is our handmade hamacas, which were a gift from my mama. One of them is displayed in the play area as a wall accessory and the other mini hamaca is outdoors. I think it's essential to incorporate elements of your roots; it's a nice reminder of where you come from.

What about the artwork?

We started collecting whilst we were in University. We have pieces that my husband bought when he was studying in New York, as well as pieces from his papa, who painted

'We should focus on what makes us happy not what is trendy'



beautiful landscapes. I have a few items from Colombian artists such as a nice Villegas, given as a wedding gift.

Do you entertain a lot in this home?

Another thing about Colombians is that we celebrate everything, so yes. Most of our friends are from when we first arrived, nine years ago. We have built a nice community around us, the famous 'amigos from the world'. We both love to cook so we love to host. We have frequent paella nights, game nights, Halloween parties, pool parties, Christmas parties and, of course, football match night.

The little ones also love spending time at home, and we often have playdates and pool parties. My home has become popular among the little ones as well – it looks like a nursery most afternoons.

What was the biggest challenge when making this villa into your home?

The biggest downside is that this house is rented and that we know that one day we will leave. We have created so many memories and built this home with our hearts, but we know that this is not ours. The biggest challenge will be the day we say *adios*.

What makes a successful interior?

C'est Ici is very much focused on creating designs on a very personal level. Tati [Tatiana Jaramillo] and I have completely different styles when it comes to decorating and styling. That said, we both work brilliantly together and take our clients on as part of the team, which is key. It's a mix and match of our ideas and inspiration with the client's style. At the end of the

Monica's top haunts include West Elm; "you can never go wrong". Crate & Barrel and Pottery Barn are "classic and woody", Galleries Lafayette and Bloomingdale's are "my go-to concept stores" and "I am absolutely obsessed with high-end Scandinavian Ikon House and D.tales"



'Every corner, every item, has a memory and a story'

day, they will live in the homes, not us.

Structure is crucial. Our clients usually hire us because they have a bunch of ideas but can't pull them together. We give them structured advice, and transform their vision into reality – that's when you realize that you've completed a successful project.

What's the biggest mistake that people make when it comes to interiors?

Allowing clutter. Most of our clients tend to pile up unnecessary stuff that ends up messing up the aesthetic. One of our favourite projects is to declutter; in fact, we have a specific service, 'Declutter My Closet'.

Another mistake? Badly hung wall accessories – art or curtains. Sometimes they're too low or too high, which changes the complete look of the room.

We also notice that our clients' furniture is really nice but it's too big or too small for the space, which makes the aesthetic look wrong.

Who do you admire?

Personally, I admire my Frenchie! He is my number one fan and partner in crime for the last 14 years. He has supported me every stage of my life and I truly value that.

Anyone who has mentored you?

My mama. Like me, she studied and worked as a family lawyer until she had kids. She started her own business as a real estate developer in Colombia and now she is in the business of interiors.

Anywhere you specifically look for ideas?

One of my favourite interiors' sites is Houzz.

"The kids' rooms will always be very special – we were both very involved in the design and making of those rooms," says Monica who is impressed about her favourite parts of her home





MATHÈO



Tati, Monica's fellow Colombian, best friend and business partner comes for a catch up in the zen corner. It is full of hanging plants, put up by Monica and Aisa, her nanny and 'right-hand'. Acapulco chairs and a rattan daybed from Tribe plus cushions and tribal accessories from White Moss complete the space

Your dream home would be...?

I am very close to my family, so it would be located in Coral Gables, Miami. A French-style house, designed from scratch by us.

Is there a place you have seen that you wish you had worked on?

Yes! My in-laws live in this beautiful villa in Grasse, South of France. I would love to take that villa on as a project and transform it...

What are your favourite interiors haunts?

Dubai has opened up so many beautiful boutique online stores; White Moss, Urban Nest, the Bowery Company, Nook and Home & Soul. When it comes to creativity and out-of-the-box finds I head to Etsy.

Is there a place that truly inspires you?

Colombia! There is something very magical about my country that inspires happiness. I love my culture, food... Colombia is passion! We have so much to give! We are truly positive people. **H**

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LOVE

AND
AND
ORDER
LEAVE
AND
IMPOSSIBLE
TO FORGET

IF A MAN SAYS HE WILL FIX IT,
HE WILL THERE IS NO NEED TO
RETURN HIM EVERY 6 MONTHS.