

HISTORY REVISITED

Saoirse Ronan on the role she found 'too close to home'

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

The town struggling to heal itself after a school shooting

GENERATION SELFIE

Allison Pearson and daughter go head to head over a teenage obsession

IN FOR THE KILL

Meet Malaika, the big-cat star of Sir David Attenborough's groundbreaking new series



Although architect Annabel Karim Kassir's new north London home could be summed up prosaically in a single word as vast, she repeatedly gravitates to one of its smallest spaces. The all-red womb-like bar on the ground floor has a chaise covered in the same scarlet velvet as the walls. It's a little bit Hôtel Costes, a little bit David Lynch – overly sensual, with intimate acoustics to match. 'When we have parties in the house, I like to pack everyone into this room,' says Karim Kassir, who, in short skirt, boots and spectacles, embodies a kind of Bobo-chic that falls between French rock star and starchitect. 'At other times I like to come here alone and read. It's a place for meditation. Just like the swimming pool in the basement.'

Ah, yes, the pool. There may not be a more beautiful swimming pool in private hands in Europe. The lines of this space and the way light floods in from a skylight at the far end are exciting enough, but the emerald granite that covers every surface and the hyper-modern chandeliers that hang from the ceiling turn it into something truly remarkable. 'The choice of green was about bringing the garden into the room,' explains Karim Kassir. 'It's not just about having a pool in the basement, it's about having somewhere that you want to go to a lot, just to spend time.'

Right now, Karim Kassir spends a substantial percentage of her time in the house that she shares with her husband, Radwan, and artist son, Roland,

but she is still a global citizen, clocking up air miles at an exhausting pace. 'I am a French architect,' she says, 'but my experiences visiting different countries and discovering new cultures inspire my designs.' Karim Kassir founded her architectural practice in Paris in 1994, and for the past 20 years she has been pivotal to the regeneration of the design scene in Beirut. She recently finished work on a glamorous beach restaurant in Dubai (the latest in a series of projects with restaurateur Mourad Mazouz) and is working on a spectacular glass-pavilion golf club in the Persian Gulf.

Her home serves as a testing ground for many of her projects: her innovative lighting design and her obsession with unusual textiles and textures



are evident throughout – from gold leather on the toilet walls to embossed hides on the doors, which look like an Arabian twist on Hermès luxe.

Karim Kassab's globetrotting has infused the spaces with eclectic influences. Her bedroom is open plan, with white walls and a wooden bath straight out of a Japanese ryokan. The pale wood and functional lines of the tub fit the pared style of the room, but it is highly functional too; Karim Kassab is big on practicality. 'Often in winter you don't want to stand in the bathroom and wash,' she explains. 'You want to immerse yourself entirely in hot water. And with the Japanese way of bathing, you are sitting, not lying down. You can look out of the window and relax.'



A LIGHT TOUCH

With innovative structures and lighting, plus a nod to Middle Eastern design, an architect has transformed her traditional London house into an atmospheric modern home. By **Mark C O'Flaherty**. Photographs by **David Brooks**

The living room can be partitioned off from the entrance hall with a sliding floor-to-ceiling 'wall'. The Bastiano sofas are by Tobia Scarpa for Knoll (knoll.com). **The basement** swimming pool is clad in green granite and the water is reflected in a mirrored ceiling. The Diamond by CAI-Light (cai-light.com) also refracts light around the space.



Other exotic elements include hand-blocked wallpaper by Madame Françoise Blanc-Subes, who Karim Kassab discovered working on her own in a castle in the south-west of France a decade ago. There are graphic blue and white tiles from Portugal covering the back of the house, conjuring images of Mediterranean holidays, and a Topkapi Palace-like tiled interior in Radwan's office. 'He is from

Turkey originally,' says Karim Kassab, 'so it was a nice way to incorporate the style in London.'

There are Middle Eastern accents in Karim Kassab's aesthetic, both in her commercial projects and at home. Much of it comes from her work in lighting design – she has been creating pieces as part of her CAI-Light line (a collaboration with Christophe Hascoët and Isabelle Rolland) for pri-



vate clients for years. Several designs will launch commercially in the UK next year, many of them featuring sci-fi modern shapes that cast the kind of shadow you would expect from a filigree lantern. The look has become something of a Karim Kassab trademark. At night, the largely bare walls of her London house are enlivened with atmospheric shade that hints at souks and hammams.



At night, the largely bare walls of Karim Kassab's house are enlivened with atmospheric lighting that hints at souks and hammams

The staircase A sinuous staircase in oak connects the basement and ground floor. The metal balustrade at the top is one of many contrasting textures and visual surprises in the property. **The exterior** Dating from 1902, this vast house retains its traditional appearance from the street.



When Karim Kassab was reworking this old house, she opened up the rooms, creating unusual perspectives, connecting volumes and elongating sightlines. Where there was an essential fixture, she turned it into something dramatic. The banisters were removed from the main staircase and replaced with an arrangement of bookshelves. 'I've always thought about what might be the best way to

organise books,' says Karim Kassab. 'This way, it gives their shelves another function.'

This is a house that is big on pattern but which makes a virtue of white space, taking its aforementioned mood lighting to a new level of sophistication. And just as Karim Kassab labours over every graphic pattern on every inch of wallpaper, the negative space has to be just so. 'If it's a white wall,

it has to be done perfectly,' she says. 'You need to choose the right kind of white. If you don't get the shade and texture right, it won't look good at all.'

One of her favourite things to do at home is to host wine tastings for friends. She is, as she says, 'creating memories', and she believes she has taken a house that had a 'bad vibration' and 'given it a soul'. 'When we bought this place, it hadn't been



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The office on the ground floor was a 'bland, nothing space' before Karim Kassab transformed it with tiles inspired by the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul.

The staircase Karim Kassab built the entire banister-cum-bookcase from MDF first to trial it and ensure the storage compartments had the right dimensions.

The bar features scarlet velvet-clad walls.



'It's not about scale or extravagance, but how much you think about something. I am impressed by quality'



The master bedroom suite is huge but Karim Kassab has furnished it sparsely, curtaining off the 'floating' Air bed by Lago (from livingspaceuk.com) to divide the space. Cabuchon (cabuchon.com) has Japanese-style tubs.

The spare bedroom Karim Kassab's love of surface pattern is evident here; the walls, ceiling and wardrobes have all been wallpapered. The last took a week to complete.

taken care of,' she says. 'The spaces didn't work together, so I had to restructure it all. Someone else might have put one large window on the back of the house, but I studied the way the light worked and where it fell, and we structured things differently. It's not about scale or extravagance, but how much you think about something. I am impressed by quality. When I travelled to Giza, I was most impressed by the smallest of the pyramids, because it was more considered than the larger ones.'

Karim Kassab sees her house as a contemporary take on a Victorian home. 'I am very interested by the British of that era, and how they collected things on their Grand Tour,' she says. 'They brought all their memories home with them from their travels. And that's what I'm doing, whether it's a certain colour on a window frame, or the Portuguese tiles on the back of the house.' Along the way, she has created a set of beautiful living spaces, with most sharing different roles. And when she hosts those wine tastings with friends, they aren't always in the most obvious places. 'We always have the champagne tasting by the swimming pool,' she says. 'Half inside and half outside.' ■

