

BONA FIDE MINIMALISM

*An architectural spectacle in Amman arranges materials to form a bold and dynamic presence in a historic location and break cultural norms. Athwifa Saleem sits with designer extraordinaire **Staffan Tollgård**, who shares the inspirations behind the wonderful ensemble*





An interior view of the living room. Courtesy of Tollgard Design Group



Clockwise from top:
Dining room view of the
villa; an interior view of
a bedroom; recreation
room view. Courtesy of
Tollgard Design Group



Exterior view of the villa.
Courtesy of Tollgard
Design Group

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The interior design of this monumental family villa, completed in 2019, has been a labour of love for filmmaker-turned-architect designer and founder of Tollgard Design Group, Staffan Tollgård. “Helping families create homes that nurture their lives, inspire their passions, protect their relationships - these are rewarding goals and we feel incredibly privileged to have been able to work with the client partners that we have had over the last many years,” expresses Tollgård. “We have a strong, shared belief that the best design journeys are the shared ones, and that thoughtful, responsible and collaborative design can and should make people’s lives better.”

The team starts off each project by searching for the ‘red thread’, a term derived from the Northern European notion that describes the unique creative DNA of a piece of work: the linking or guiding theme, motif or fundamental principle. The red thread always combines the story of a family, in a building, in a place. Likewise, the Amman Villa project portrays the story of a young, vibrant family building a life in an incredibly modern building set against a Jordanian backdrop. ‘Heartfelt minimalism’, is the term that has been coined to describe the

project. “We worked with Lebanese architect Raed Abillama and a team of local contractors and craftsmen to create a bold and dynamic presence in a historic location,” expresses Tollgård. Raed’s architectural *tour de force* reconfigures materials to perpetually push the envelope and challenge cultural norms. In a bid to create a seamless transition between the interior and exterior, the joinery, kitchens and furniture have been designed in an elegant, minimal way. The space is also home to its very own private art gallery. “Unlike many galleries, that can feel cold and that exist only to house and light the artwork, this is a warm space framed with natural materials: a gallery for life,” shares Tollgård.

Staffan Tollgård’s goal was to curate an art collection for the project made of strong, bold works which would not drown in the large spaces; pieces that would stand the test of time and become as important to the interior as the materials of the building and the furniture inside. A colour-shifting piece by Chinese contemporary artist Zhuang Hong Yi makes the transition from the reception room to the formal dining room an interesting one. “We have a Ruth Waller and Lee Hewett large-scale circular triptych on the same floor whose simplicity, using interior textile surfaces, has captured the

homeowner’s as well as visitors’ hearts,” expresses Tollgård. In the entrance, a typically whimsical and colourful piece by famed artist Susan Shup with a personal message from the family, is meticulously placed. Also showcased well near the entrance of the abode is a human-scale version of the sculpture *The Visitor* in bronze by artist Guido Deleu, subtly welcoming visitors into the house. The villa has been meticulously designed by Tollgård and his team to create a family home for five, as well as a venue for entertaining that could elegantly seat 24 guests at a formal dinner. The dining room sees two bespoke, versatile tables that can be pulled apart, set together, or intertwined to create a single table nearly six metres long. The decorative lighting has been set to be equally flexible, resulting in a cloudscape of lights above the dining area.

“While the balance of form and function is at the head of our practice, you might say the heart of our work is about how to create spaces and opportunities for family time and personal growth,” expresses Tollgård. “When we get this right there is a huge feeling of satisfaction - even happiness - at seeing this transformation. This project was one such transformation indeed.” ■
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