

WHITE

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THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

A SINGULAR AESTHETIC VISION HELPED TRANSFORM
THIS BRITISH COUPLE'S ISLAND HOME INTO A STYLISH
SUMMER GETAWAY FUSED WITH BALEARIC NOSTALGIA

Words: Danni Landa Photography: Ana Lui



Fashion editor, ceramicist and interiors guru Deborah Brett has always surrounded herself with beauty and creative innovation. She has an innate and effortless sense of style, despite her insistence that an aesthetic disposition can be taught – something she can attest to, having completed her studies at the prestigious Central Saint Martins in London during one of the school's most creatively prolific eras. Her peers included Stella McCartney, Matthew Williamson and Lee (Alexander) McQueen, and like her famous alumni, Deborah went onto a highly successful career in fashion, focusing on journalism, design and philanthropy for over 20 years before returning to her artistic roots to create ceramics.

While she believes anyone can learn design basics, Deborah's instinct has been refined through her career in the media. "My job for so many years was what you would classically call styling," she says. "What you're actually doing is creating something through layering. You take a jacket, add a skirt, add earrings, add movement and light, and you turn it into something whole and beautiful. You're building an image from component parts – that's what I do with my homes too." Here in Ibiza, Deborah's stunning summer home is a testament to her keen eye for trends, obsession with details and endless love for the feeling of freedom that this island offers.

Her connection to the Balearics harks back to her childhood – from a very young age until the end of her high school years, Deborah's family would de-camp to a villa on a beach in Mallorca for the summer. It was a defining experience that shaped her life and world view, nourishing her adolescent soul. Years later, while grieving the loss of her mother in the early 2000s, Deborah returned to the islands with a friend, this time landing in Ibiza. "I immediately fell in love with it," she recalls. "It was very familiar to me. I understand that Balearic sensibility. It's not the same as Mallorca of course, but it has that energy. You either arrive in Ibiza and think 'what's all the fuss?' or your heart melts. You could say I defected from Mallorca to Ibiza. It feels like second nature to me to be here."

The following year, Deborah and her partner, filmmaker Tom Edmunds, started to look for a property on the island. They wanted to recreate that nostalgic feeling of summer freedom for their own family but, like anywhere in the world, buying property is all about managing your expectations. It took three years of searching and a few disappointments until the couple came across a little farmhouse in Cala Carbó, overlooking the iconic monolithic rock of Es Vedra. Unfortunately, six months later the government placed a moratorium on building and their dream of extending the finca to become a family home seemed to be slipping away.

"The classification of the land changed, and it got very complicated," Deborah explains. "We couldn't build but we were allowed to renovate so we made it into a lovely one-bedroom casita." But as the family was growing rapidly, the space was not suitable for long – the hunt for the perfect Ibiza home continued. While Deborah remained in London with the children, Tom went on another reconnaissance tour of the island, tasked with finding a property the family could move into straight away. "We wanted something that was already renovated and ready to go," Deborah explains. As long-term residents of Ibiza know however, what you are looking for is often the very opposite of what the island will give you.







Tom found five potential properties – four of them ticked all the right boxes and the fifth was a wild card. “He left it till last,” Deborah recalls. “I opened the gate and I knew right away. Of course, I chose the difficult one.” Painted bright orange, with crenellated walls like a big faux castle, there were heavy bars on the windows, dead trees everywhere and a rusty abandoned Buddha in the garden. The house was crowded with so many dubious design choices that its jaw-dropping view of Es Vedra was lost amongst the chaos. “It looked like a scene from *Narcos*,” Deborah says. “But I fell in love.”

Slowly, as the couple peeled back layers of neglect, they discovered a set of strong bones from which to build their dream summer home. “We haven’t changed anything structurally,” she says. “We’ve just stripped things out, smoothed the lines, changed the colours and textures.” The transformation is truly incredible, and the house is now comprised of many beautiful corners and inspired design solutions – one of the most striking being the inner courtyard. It’s unusual to find such a large space in the traditional architecture of the island and Deborah was instantly inspired to tile the area – not with your ordinary garden tiles, of course. “At the time, there was a big tile movement and it had started to trickle into my consciousness through Instagram and Pinterest,” she explains. “A lot of the design elements we chose five years ago are becoming more common now.”

Two antique wooden doors open up to the courtyard, which stretches out before you with a vibrant blue and white pattern of contrasting curves. It’s a striking look that brings a sense of playfulness to the home. Statement tiles are a recurring theme throughout the property. A rear courtyard shares the blue and white colour scheme of the principal one with a different pattern; another outdoor space is scattered with white five-point stars on a blue background; a bedroom features geometric hexagons sprayed with white lines on a blue-grey background and one of the bathrooms appears to have been tiled with raven feathers.

This attitude to bold design choices is honed from years on the fashion circuit – Deborah feels very comfortable with change. “People often say to me: ‘Oh you’re so experimental with your make-up.’ But I know I can just wash it off if it doesn’t work. It’s the same with design. There’s no need to get hung up on a bed frame or a wall colour, when you can change it.” The interior of the home reflects her ability to play with colours, shapes and textures – shades of blue connect the exteriors and vistas to the interior living spaces. Natural fibres and rustic finishes complement vintage fixtures, while the tiniest trace of Danish post-modernism interacts seamlessly with 1950s beach-shack chic. Rattan pendants, coir rope bedheads, claw-foot bathtubs, brass and copper tapware all blend into a unique style.

While Deborah and Tom made most of the big design choices themselves, they enlisted to the help of South African born interior designer Hubert Zandberg to help inject more individual spirit into the home through his collections of Parisian flea market finds and African vintage textiles and basketry. “He helped to design our London home and he has the most wonderful eclectic eye,” says Deborah, who also worked closely with local artisans throughout the renovation process.

An iron forger made the Crittal-style doors and window frames, and a local carpenter was commissioned to create custom cabinetry from reclaimed woods. At the carpenter’s workshop one day, Deborah found herself sitting on a traditional Mediterranean chair with woven seats. Realising the texture and pattern of the design would also be perfect for cupboard doors, she went about finding a local weaver to create them. Matched with the colour scheme, the look is entirely unique and yet very Ibiza. “Traditional methods are part of the language of design here,” she says. “Craftmanship and hand-work are respected. It’s as much part of life here as the landscape. We didn’t want a gleaming palace on the edge of a cliff. We wanted our home to be part of the rugged beauty of the island.”

DESIGN



While many a marriage strains under the burden of making joint design decisions, Deborah and Tom share a singular vision when it comes to their homes. “We have a very defined aesthetic style,” she says. “Weirdly, we almost always agree. If one of us is very passionate about something and the other can take it or leave it, we always defer to the passionate one if we’re not in alignment.” For example, Tom currently wants to build a wooden pergola over the outdoor eating area, an idea Deborah understands on a practical level but is averse to visually. “I know it gets so hot there and it would provide shade and make the area cosier, but I love the openness of how it is now.” In some households, this impasse could build to tempest levels, but Deborah and Tom simply take their time. “We’re thinking about it, looking at all the different options. We might take a year to make that decision, but it’s an example of how we get things right in the end.”

That’s not to say there haven’t been lessons learned along the way. “We thought we wanted a water feature in the courtyard, but it ended up sounding like someone going to the toilet for all eternity,” Deborah laughs. Another regret was not accounting for communication between the builder and the landscape designer. Tom had a vision of huge orange and lemon trees coming up out of the tiles in the main courtyard. To do that, deep root wells need to be excavated before tiles are laid but the message didn’t transmit. “We still have the trees,” says Deborah. “They’re just much smaller. It was through inexperience and a communication breakdown, but it’s something we’ve learned. The mistakes are not mistakes, just necessary changes.”

Ultimately, Deborah and Tom’s goal of creating carefree summers surrounded by nature for their children has been a resounding success. Adjacent to the house is a little path to the local beach, which the kids can walk to on their own when they’re not taking the canoe out, playing table tennis or hanging out in their self-designed treehouse complete with turret, rope bridge and firefighter’s pole. “I’ve absolutely managed to recreate my childhood,” Deborah concludes. “It’s only very recently that the kids have even started to wear clothes when we are at the house! Ibiza is paradise for them.”

