

touch the sky

LET THIS UNIQUE HOME IN THE
CYCLADES, SOUTH-EAST OF
ATHENS, EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS.

WORDS AND STYLING **KERSTIN ROSE**
PHOTOGRAPHY **CHRISTIAN SCHAULIN**



After a 35-minute flight from the historic Greek capital Athens, you'll find Syros floating in the azure water of the Aegean Sea. One of the lesser-visited islands in the Cyclades, Syros has all the twisting laneways, whitewash and charming fishing villages you expect from the Greek islands, but it's the impressive neoclassical mansions, built by 19th-century wealthy European merchants and captains, that set it apart.

It's in this incredible setting that hair and make-up artist Jorge Tsiogkas, along with his partner Peter Hadersdorfer, a nurse, dreamt up their perfect home, to be built in the south-west corner of the island, atop the largely undeveloped Kokkina Hill. From here, they enjoy views across the sea and neighbouring islands, as well as the village of Finikas below. When Jorge commissioned Athens architectural firm Block 722 with the planning of his house, one thing was already clear: this view should be the focal point.

Jorge knew architect Sotiris Tsergas and interior designer Katja Margaritoglou — co-founders of Block 722 — before building the house in 2014. Together the three friends created the blueprint for the project and devoted themselves to learning about the colours, shapes and natural materials of the surrounding landscape. "By the time we'd finished, Jorge was almost an architect himself," recalls Katja, with a grin.

Jorge and Peter first visited the island almost 10 years ago. "We fell in love with the energy of it so we kept coming back,"

says Jorge. "We were looking for land for four years, but there was always something that didn't work out. We almost gave up, when our friend told us about this piece of land on the market. We came to see it and got goosebumps; we were speechless from the view and all the scenery."

Entering the house through aged wooden doors, the central concept is immediately apparent — opposite the entrance a window frames the water view like a picture, inviting the outside in and forming an integral part of the living space. Wander to the right and the open-plan lounge room, kitchen and dining area leads out to the grand terrace and pool. "It was a challenge finding the perfect angle that would make the pool, horizon and sea melt into each other," says Sotiris, but it was worth the effort. "I feel so close to the elements here," he adds.

Aside from the main building, there are two guesthouses. One next to the house, and another more secluded below the pool area. "We have a lot of friends that we like to spend time here with," says Jorge. The Munich resident spends at least three months each year on the quiet island, so being able to have friends join him was always part of the plan. In fact, one of Jorge's fondest memories here was a New Year's Eve party when his friends organised a fireworks show over the house. "That was such a happy night," he says. Jorge's work in the fashion industry takes him to some of the most beautiful places in the world, and the house is decorated with pieces he has brought back from his travels to Burma, >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Architect Sotiris Tsergas with interior designer Katja Margaritoglou; Katja designed the kitchen and dining table, custom-made in oak. The 'Danish' dining chairs are from Mia Collection (available online). The punched-metal lights were handmade and cast an atmospheric shadow at night; paths wind through the garden beds planted with cacti and succulents; sun-aged wood was used to make the outer door, designed by artist Pantelis Chandris in collaboration with Sotiris; stone collected during the property's excavation clads part of the exterior; the fireplace was also constructed from repurposed stone. The crocheted cushion and beanbag were handmade at a small workshop in Athens. **FACING PAGE** The white linen lounge faces out to the ocean. The table lamps match the metallic lights of the dining area. A neutral rug completes the look.





FROM TOP LEFT A polished cement bath in the master bedroom offers views out to sea; the pillows and daybeds were designed by Katja and handmade by local craftspeople; chestnut wood beams support the reed terrace roof over the outdoor dining space. Lights crocheted from rope hang above the oak table and chairs designed by Katja; the infinity pool looks out to Finikas Bay. FACING PAGE The doors in one of the guestrooms open up to a private terrace with a view of the bay below and island villages. The doors are framed with fine linen curtains and the light is handmade with rope.



New York and France — from Turkish bath towels to a stone washbasin. Everything had to get Katja's stamp of approval before being incorporated into the interior design, however. "I trust her blindly," says Jorge.

The home's interior design is built around the three pillars of architecture, water and landscape. The blue tones of the water and sky can be found in towels and bed linen. The browns and greens of the surrounding hillside are reflected in the oak timber of the custom-made dining table and kitchen cupboards. Katja designed the kitchen (including the counter and stools) and dining table, which is complemented by 'Danish' dining chairs from Mia Collection, as well as the lounges and cushions for the house. Screen-printing was used to print various motifs on the pillows.

"Nearly everything was custom-made in Athens or by local craftsmen," says Sotiris. "Raw natural materials were selected, such as wood and stone, with a strong local connection." The stones used for the outdoor areas and fireplace were collected during excavation of the property, while the terrace roof was created from chestnut wood beams and reeds.

It's clear that no effort was too great for Jorge and the friends he entrusted with bringing his vision to life. Even the front door knobs were specially made by Greek artist Pantelis Chandris. "This is the first house that's my own," says Jorge. "Everything simply had to be right." *CS*

TRAVEL NOTES

* Syros has its own small airport and is just a 35-minute flight from Athens International Airport. There are also daily ferries departing from Piraeus port, Athens (travel time varies). skyexpress.gr; hellenicseaways.gr

* July is a great time to visit Syros, when the island hosts the International Festival of the Aegean, featuring a program of theatre and musical performances running over two weeks. The Syros International Film Festival is also held in late July. festivaloftheaegean.com; syrosfilmfestival.org

* In the main town of Ermoupoli, see the Apollo Theatre by architect Pietro Sampo. Opened in 1864, it still operates today.

* Jorge's house is available to rent for part of the year. For more information, visit hillside360.com

