

HOMES • 25 May 2021

Artist Taher Asad-Bakhtiari's Dubai Home Celebrates His Nomadic Spirit

The Iranian designer's gallery-esque villa is a showcase of the tribal influences and wanderlust that inform his vibrant work

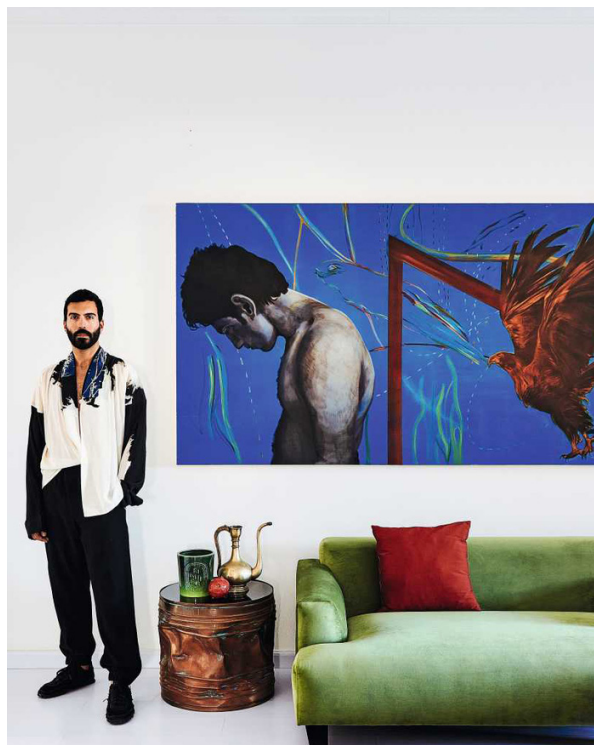
BY TALIB CHOUDHRY. PHOTOGRAPHY BY INGRID RASMUSSEN



P.C.: INGRID RASMUSSEN

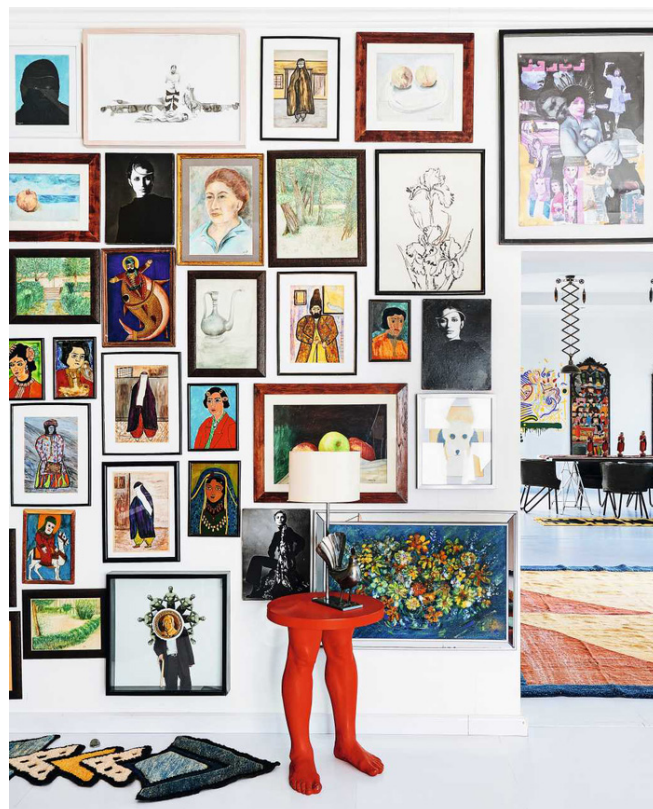
“**G**rowing up, our house in Iran was full of huge carpets and antique furniture,” recalls Taher Asad-Bakhtiari. “My dad comes from a tribal family and they still had strong connections to their roots. I remember sitting on rugs in the mountains and always hearing ‘your family name is Bahktiari’ and beginning to understand the significance of that.”

Fast-forward to today and Taher celebrates and explores this rich heritage through the tribal-inspired tapestries he has become internationally known for. Visitors to the Dubai home that the designer shares with his sister Fatemeh, who works in finance, will find that it's warm and laid-back. There are myriad seating areas, all with an informal air, where shisha pipes and sage tea are proffered. The gallery-like entrance hall serves as a Liwan, opening out into large reception rooms to the left and right, creating one free-flowing space.



Fast-forward to today and Taher celebrates and explores this rich heritage through the tribal-inspired tapestries he has become internationally known for. Visitors to the Dubai home that the designer shares with his sister Fatemeh, who works in finance, will find that it's warm and laid-back. There are myriad seating areas, all with an informal air, where shisha pipes and sage tea are proffered. The gallery-like entrance hall serves as a Liwan, opening out into large reception rooms to the left and right, creating one free-flowing space.

After moving into the villa seven years ago, the siblings created a seamless envelope with white floors, walls and ceilings and brought their favourite things together. Fatemeh's old sofas were reupholstered; Taher's art and cherished tableware were shipped over from Iran. "A lot of the things you see, I sent over from Tehran – the paintings, books, some of the furniture," he says.



One particularly striking Persian piece is the hand-painted centre table in the entry hall: “I found it in an antique shop in Tehran and they had hung it on a wall, like a painting, because it is so beautifully decorated.” There are also several mirror mosaic pieces by Taher’s late great-aunt, the celebrated Iranian artist Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and a bold portrait of her looms large in the hallway. “She was amazing – very loving and encouraging,” he recalls. “She said ‘if you’re going to be a tapestry artist then master the craft. What you can do with tapestries is limitless’.”



Taher holds a rare vintage Persian Ikat silk throw. In the background, a portrait of his great-aunt, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian is displayed alongside some of her iconic mirrored artworks. Plus, a red triptych by Ramin Haririzadeh.

As well as Taher’s own work, the family’s diverse textile collection includes precious kilims, intricate tapestries and bolts of vibrant vintage fabrics, which are taken from hibernation in a capacious hallway cupboard and unfurled, creating rippling rainbows in the all-white rooms. It’s something Taher recalls his mother doing since his childhood: “This guy would come to our house every month and open suitcases full of tribal fabrics, clothes and jewellery from Iran, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. My mom and aunts would choose all these beautiful pieces to wear and display.”



The dining room features a colourful artwork by Abdullah Qandeel that was painted directly onto the wall. The dining table, chairs and lights are all from Marina Home.

In contrast, there's an industrial, New York-loft vibe to the dining room, anchored by a roughly hewn wood and metal table and a run of pendants that resemble task lighting. They contrast with polished, mirrored lamps and finely detailed paintings, including a large piece of Iranian cafe art. "I like an eclectic, organic feel and want people to be comfortable," says Taher. "It doesn't matter if you spill something on the table. In the house we just mix and match and put it all together, you know?" This professed laissez-faire stance is only partly true; while Taher definitely takes an eclectic approach to decoration, he has a laser-like attention to detail, which comes from his experience of running an events company in Tehran. After studying hotel management in Lausanne, Switzerland, he worked for a time in London before moving back to Iran and starting a "small catering company" which grew rapidly to staging large gatherings where the *mise en scène* was always memorable.

"While I was doing the events, I was making a lot of bespoke products – trays, vases, tables – and parallel to that I was doing my design work as well," he says. "I wanted to come up with a lifestyle line that demonstrated craftsmanship in Iran and the first thing I started working with was kilims. These were the first ones I produced." He gestures towards finely woven, almost translucent tapestries which are displayed on stands in front of the windows in the living room.



Tribal textiles adorn Taher's bed and one of his wallhangings serves as a dramatic headboard.

Taher's bold, graphic designs present a contemporary take on tribal motifs and each piece is woven on a handloom by semi-nomadic women in Iran. "I wanted them to rethink their craft and realise that it could have different applications," he says. "I mostly wanted to work with the weave to create a lace-like effect. It didn't make sense to them at first, but now they love working with me. I've pushed them to a new boundary."

The tapestries were exhibited in Tehran alongside Taher's upcycled barrels, design-art pieces which have become eminently collectible (Beyoncé owns one). Sourced from building sites around the Iranian capital, where they are used for myriad purposes by Afghani migrant workers, the barrels are polished and resin-coated to emphasise their humble, unassuming beauty.

To focus on his burgeoning passion for design, Taher moved from Tehran to New York for a time, followed by a stint in Dubai, and continues to divide his time between the three cities. His recent collaboration with Italian rug brand cc-tapis has taken his designs in a more scalable direction; the graphic runners also feature his signature arrow-like shapes but are robust enough to be used in commercial settings. Inspired by astrology, religion and ancient civilisations, they would look equally striking on a hallway floor or used as a wall hanging.



In the entrance hall, a centre table made using a hand-painted vintage Persian top is encircled by Taher's resin-coated barrels.

Taher is also represented by several international galleries (including Carwan Gallery in Athens and Hostler Burrows in New York) and has plans to open his own space in Tehran or Dubai, where he can articulate his creative vision more fully. "I want it to be fluid... maybe I turn it into a shop for a couple of months, maybe I turn it into a gallery," he explains. "I don't have a fixed plan for it. I like the idea of making a start and seeing where it leads, like unravelling a spool of thread."

