

THE PRIVATE *life*



MANZILI HOUSE, NAIROBI, KENYA

Manzili House might be in the leafy Nairobi suburb of Karen, but it's no 1930s colonial homestead. Instead, it conjures a Swahili coastal retreat, playing on the equatorial beach vibes of Lamu Island – the happy place of owner Vanessa Roumequere. A designer whose Simply Classics Africa brand is a nostalgic celebration of the romance of the bush, Roumequere made Manzili her lockdown project. With the heavy lift of a team of Lamu artisans, it took only a year to complete, from first sketch to finishing touches. The stucco work, polished lime and coral-dust walls and traditional vidaka Swahili niches add depth to a simple architectural frame. A discreet and private six-bedroom rental, Manzili is proving popular with creatives, including actor Owen Wilson and designer Alice Temperley. The rooms are divided across two buildings separated by a pool, an oasis for the weavers and parrots that thread through the shade of the acacias and frangipani. The villas can be rented together or separately and come with a staff of seven, including an excellent cook who specialises in Swahili dinners on the roof terrace – at eye level with the bush babies. With sound healers, massage therapists and yoga mats on tap, Manzili offers a gentle introduction to the layered energy of East African culture, with generous and urbane hosting by Roumequere and her husband George, a former bush pilot with many a story to tell. CATHERINE FAIRWEATHER

From about £2,200 per night; manzilihouse.com

VILLA ZEINA AT AL MOUDIRA HOTEL, LUXOR, EGYPT

Nearly 25 years ago photographer and designer Zeina Aboukheir transformed Al Moudira, a desert wilderness on Luxor's then little-visited West Bank, into a bohemian 54-room boutique hotel.

Ever since, the likes of Kate Moss and Christian Louboutin have been drawn to its terracotta arches and arabesques, sandy pathways looping to curio-filled bedrooms, gardens where Nile Valley sunbirds teeter on bougainvillea and a restaurant tucked behind a salvaged latticed mashrabiya. Now, five-bedroom Villa Zeina, the private residence of its founder, is available to rent. Its domed roofs rise like piped peach meringues from its palm-fringed garden and jade-green pool. It's a place of Turkish chandeliers and hand-painted trompe l'oeil curtains, where the Islamic windows were made with Alexandrian glass in cobalt and canary shades. Many of the antiques were chosen by Aboukheir on her travels to Beirut, Italy, India, Aleppo and Istanbul, and the library's mother-of-pearl inlaid cabinets house Egyptology tomes. In the master suite, frescoes of Pharaonic sites cavort across columns and, in the interior courtyard, cushion-filled alcoves are perfect for sipping hibiscus karkade tea while listening to the call to prayer. A private chef can whip up Egyptian dishes such as molokhia jute leaf stew and rosewater-infused mahalabia milk pudding, and a butler can sort massages, yoga and tours in a restored 1965 stretch Mercedes 200. IANTHE BUTT

From £3,150 per night; moudira.com



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK AYABEI & JED NUENGA; YEHIA EL ALILY; MARK ANTHONY FOX