

Almaaz Shamsee

Living out her passion

Who is Almaaz?

Almas Shamsee is an award winning interior designer born in Kenya, but now married, living and working in Central London. She is married with one son aged 9.

You are born and brought up in Kenya. Why London now?

I originally came to London to study. After graduation, I ended up getting a job intending to get a few years work experience in London. But I ended up meeting my now husband and all these years later I am still in London. However, my family (parents) still live in Kenya and I still travel back several times a year to see them. There are so many exciting things happening on the property scene in Kenya at the moment and I am keen to develop a presence in Kenya on both the residential and commercial design scene.

Do people get to see an element of Kenya in your interior design work?

I love travel and do so regularly so I draw many influences in my design schemes. However, growing up in Kenya I am used to big open living spaces with lots of light and bright, vibrant colours. I always try and introduce both these elements in my design schemes.

Why did you switch to interior design given that you are a trained economist?

I always loved design and even when I was working as an economist I was renovating and designing properties on the side. So when I had my son I decided to take my time off during maternity leave to retrain and took a course at the prestigious Chelsea College of Art and Design. I love the creative process and the opportunity to create something from scratch and at the end of the day. It's the most rewarding job I have ever done.

What's your décor style?

I think broadly my style is classic contemporary. But ultimately, it's about working with the client and ensuring that their tastes and personality are reflected in the design. For example, this year my company has completed projects ranging from an industrial feel warehouse conversation apartment to a more opulent apartment with stunning marble and centerpiece a backlit alabaster bar and we are currently working on a riverside penthouse with a more sleek Italian feel.

What are some of the highlights of your job?

2016 has been an exciting year for Maisha Design as we have had the opportunity to work on so many exciting projects including two hotels. However, the highlight was winning the award for Best London apartment interior design apartment, at the International Property Awards for my Butlers Wharf project.

Describe your day...

I normally start at 8am and most days go meet our builders on site to ensure work is progressing in line with the design. Then its back to the office, grabbing a Starbucks on the way. I then go through progress on all our live projects with my designer. Then it can be anything from checking on the delivery status of furniture we have designed, to preparing mood boards or client meetings in the office. After lunch I try to schedule any supplier visits. My day in the office can end at any time between 3 and 6 depending on whether I am collecting my son from school, which I try to do at least twice a week.

What's your interior décor/design pet peeve?

It's the assumption that you can design a space just by changing a few bits of furniture and throwing in a few cushions. Our design

process looks at the looks at the whole interior architecture of the space. In most of our projects we undertake building work to ensure that the spatial design works before we move to the more decorative side.

Where have you showcased your work?

My work has been showcased around the world in newspapers, interiors magazine and books, thanks to my pr; niche-pr.co.uk

You have a huge portfolio, what's your take on work-life balance?

Being a working mum is always hard. But it's important to rely on the people around you to help juggle the day to day responsibilities. Having your own business is a 24/7 job, but I always take at least one full day off on the week-end to spend time with my son and husband. Aside from that I also try and take time to exercise, my twice weekly Zumba class has helped preserve my sanity in the past year!

Is interior décor for only specific people? Any advice for upcoming pro's or someone with a passion for this?

You have to be passionate about design to be good. It's something that can't be taught! My design course gave me the tools to execute the design through technical drawing and how to do professional mood boards, but the design style is something that just comes naturally – I can't walk into a room for the forth time without mentally knocking down all the walls and starting again! My biggest advice to anyone starting out is to be prepared to work very hard and be prepared to get your hands dirty. I spend more time on dusty building sites than in fancy fabric show rooms. The job is not glamorous! But the finished project is worth it. Nothing beats that feeling when at the end of a project you look at and think"this was all in my mind"!!

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