

The Stephanie Kind of Style

Empty frames and mural size paintings, skin-tugs, a shimmy dress and easy conversation reflect personality and the fine taste of Stephanie Kienle Gonzalez.

*By ANNA ISABEL C. SOBREPES
Photography by DOX ALINDALYO*

Styling by JOHN LOZANO
Assisted by KENDALL ESPIRITU
Makeup by BYRON VELASQUEZ
for MAC COSMETICS
Hair by JAM ENDROSOLAN

Multicolored strapless gown with painterly prints by MILLY; Military Hand-wound in 18-carat pink gold timepiece by AUDEMARS PIGUET



Blue pleated dress by MIA
ARCENAS, orange palazzo
pants by BCBG MAXAZRIA,
Royal Oak Selfwinding in
18-carat pink gold timepiece
by AUDEMARS PIGUET

The home of Stephanie Kienle Gonzalez gives some indications of the people who live there. Art on the wall and on the floor or the surface tops are appurtenances to a lifestyle punctuated by travel, culture and the outdoors. Famous names share equal billing with unfamiliar signatures in a collection of reputable provenance. African and European artists and accent pieces carry the modern sensibility akin to the framed works of Fernando Zobel in the hallway.

Through the front door, past the foyer, a comfort zone opens up to spaces with cushy couches, tables with family photos, a zebra rug and a setting for meals. Double-glazed tinted glass walls extend from floor to ceiling for a visual reach to a skyline at eyelevel with a setting sun. There are acquisitions from trips abroad that come together with local furniture and accoutrements. They are all part of a story of the residents.

FRIENDLY, CHIC, ELEGANT

Steph, as she is called in her circle of family and friends, settles among the pillows on the sofa in a shimmer, white cocktail dress by Alessandra Peroz-Rubio. A large contemporary painting leans against the wall beside an empty gilded frame. The tastefully configured living room is a welcoming space conveying a premium for comfort and warmth. It invites relaxed conversation and an intimacy for making connections.

"We began collecting when it was quite affordable," she says of the paintings that now command top prices in international auction houses. Drawn to 20th century Filipino and contemporary South African art, she mentions particulars about each of the works with recollections that keeps a smile on her face. "I am very visual, so it really depends on the piece," she remarks. "Sometimes, it just sticks out to me for no reason." Personal taste rather than investment considerations built up the lot hanging in the rooms. That is also what largely created the look of the residence on the 15th floor.

"I try to find the right balance between contemporary and traditional. While I appreciate both, I like bringing in pieces with age and soul to a contemporary space. I love neutral palettes with a pop of color, natural materials and textures. I steer away from clutter, be it fashion or interior-wise."

There have been several occasions when she was asked to describe her personal aesthetics. "I never

answer it in the same way," she laughs. "I think my style changes with time."

SISTER SYNERGY

Her easy demeanor belies a strong drive that compels her to pack the waking hours with a gamut of tasks and activities. "I am a type A, who likes to organize things and maximize my days," she says, beaming a smile that comes easily as she speaks. "I am still working on my patience. It reflects in my lifestyle as I try to fit in as much as I can in my day."

"I love ending my day feeling like I have accomplished something. It gives me a sense of fulfillment, be it for work, for the home, for my family or for myself. I find less and less time for myself lately, and I hope to slowly balance that out eventually."

Besides a happy home life, Steph is into Philux, a family enterprise in the manufacture of furniture. The company, started by her parents, is now being run by Steph and her sister Jessica Maxwell. Jess is the head of design and is the creative spirit who spearheads the new collections. She also handles the look of the showrooms and helps me with various other projects. We are very different people but we work well together because of this. We both share the same values, principles and direction for Philux and this has helped define our different roles in the company. It is a pleasure having her as my colleague and partner."

"I try to find the right balance between contemporary and traditional. While I appreciate both, I like bringing in pieces with age and soul to a contemporary space. I love neutral palettes with a pop of color, natural materials and textures. I steer away from clutter, be it fashion or interior-wise"

EX FUTURE ENTERTAINER

The career path may have been a case of osmosis, although there had been no pressure on the girls to pursue the course they eventually took. The child Steph had envisioned herself becoming a popstar. "I loved performing as a kid and still enjoy spontaneous karaoke nights now," she beams. Exposure to the rudiments of furniture-making opened up another option.

"As little girls, Jessica and I would accompany my mom when she would do the rounds of the showrooms and visit my dad in the factory. We were involved at a young age in the sense that we saw the day-to-day operations and would hear my parents talking about work. My father would tell us to observe how something was made or ask what we thought was not right with a particular piece." These instructive engagements cultivated an interest in the business. Undergraduate studies prepared her for the responsibilities of vice-president for sales and business development.

She schooled at the Lycée Français of Manila before pursuing Economics in Sarah Lawrence College, New York. Steph went for further studies, enrolling in the international program of Sciences Politiques in Paris. "I also took a marketing course at the London School of Economics," she adds. "More than my school degrees, I think that living abroad played a big role in molding my work ethic. That is what I have tried to bring home with me at Philux." Besides this and her aesthetic sense, Steph counts passion, professionalism and attention to detail among the qualities she brings to the table.

WOOD AS A SIGNATURE

An executive summary of Euromonitor International indicates a growing demand for Philippine-made furniture. Export to international markets are contributing to the country's revenues but bigger than that is the local market. Developments in the housing sector, according to the Chamber of Furniture Industries in the Philippines, pushes the figures higher. People are buying for their homes and condominiums as the economy improves. "The local market is growing exponentially and consumer tastes are becoming more refined," Steph confirms. "I believe that we are well-placed to be a leader in this growth."

Philux is a proudly Filipino brand that offers contemporary furniture of great design and quality

at good value. What sets us apart from international brands are our price points. We want to be an inclusive, not an exclusive brand, that offers luxury within reach. What sets us apart from local brands is our ability to develop new designs very rapidly because of our manufacturing capacity and get them to the market as quickly as possible. Additionally, our capacity is local consumer driven and we spend our resources designing, producing and selling 100 percent local."

Travel and trends provide inspirations for the company output. "However, we stick to what we are known for and what we are good at," she says. "Philux works with solid wood, upholstery, metals and other natural materials to make pieces that are contemporary yet timeless in design with a Filipino touch."

ANDREA HERLMIGHTER

Steph oversees the retail operation, supervises their sales team and studies opportunities for growth. "We are a small family business," she says. "My parents taught us to be hands-on. I do get involved in the production and creation of new collections alongside my sister, and am also involved in the administrative work."

She visits the factory in the mornings as part of her daily schedule and when things are not too busy, she heads back home to squeeze in a quick lunch with daughter Andrea. "We enjoy being silly together. We sing, dance, play dress up. She even puts on my makeup and ends up looking like a clown when her papa is not around. I love those moments with her. I hope to never lose them."

Her day continues with showroom visits that includes the new Philux store which recently opened in Shangri-La at the Fort. "I try to end my afternoons with meetings near my home so that I can catch Andrea after her nap. If not, she comes and visits me in the showroom." It reminds her of the routine she had with her mom when she was growing up.

"On a good day, I can carve out an hour for some exercise, but these have been quite rare lately as we are working on another showroom project." At the end of the day, she returns home, makes sure dinner is in order and spends a quiet evening with hubby Chris and Andrea. "My favorite part are our dinner conversations," she smiles. "Andrea is a little ham and makes us laugh all the time."

Plum serpentine gown by
TONY EVAN; Royal Oak
Selfwinding in 18-carat
pink gold timepiece by
AUDEMARS PIGUET

“I am not a creature of habit and enjoy doing things spontaneously. I love to dance and be active and just find some time for myself to exercise and get a manicure”

Whoa with stars with gold filigree detail by ALESSANDRA PEREZ RUBIO for MESTIZA, Millesimo Hand-wound in 18-carat pink gold timepiece by AUDEMARS PIGUET



Beige sheer top with floral embroidered details by **TC ALVAREZ**; Royal Oak Offshore Quartz in 18-carat pink gold timepiece by **AUDEMARS PIGUET**

SAFARI HOLIDAYS

Family is a bedrock in her life. She was raised by parents who belonged to two different cultures. Max, her father, is a Swiss Belgian, who was born in Congo and mother Zella is Filipino. They spoke French at home and went to a French school in Manila but "I am Filipino at heart," she says. "We enjoyed visiting our family abroad, but Manila was and is always home to us. We learned different things from Mom and Dad, though they shared and taught us the same values growing up."

"They traveled a lot, something that she continues to do with Chris and their daughter. "Travel is important to us," she says. "It is our time to recharge and spend

quality time together, enjoy slow living. We love the outdoors and try to explore new places in the Philippines when we find the time. Adding some adventure to the mix makes things exciting."

Going on safaris has become an annual favorite holiday. "Aside from the animals and incredible nature, it is just an incredibly humbling experience. We love being outdoors to appreciate our beautiful earth." Even as she enthuses about the natural world, she mentions her capitals in the same breath. "I also love cities like Paris, Tokyo and New York for their food, shopping and culture though city trips do not recharge me as much as outdoors do."

The travel enthusiast researches on interesting



White button down shirt by **VELVET**; Royal Oak Selfwinding in stainless steel timepiece by **AUDEMARS PIGUET**



White button-down shirt by
VELVET, Royal Oak Selfwinding
 in stainless steel timepiece by
AUDEMARS PIGUET

places to visit. "I love planning trips in advance, because we all look forward to them." Their family of three like to explore new places on weekends. "I am not a creature of habit and enjoy doing things spontaneously. I love to dance and be active and just find some time for myself to exercise and get a manicure."

THE STEPH TABLE

On top of all that she is currently doing, Stephanie will be busy with the transfer to a new place. It will have more room and is closer to where her parents live. She looks forward to entertaining small groups of friends and kin at the new address. "I like my guests to feel at home, nothing too formal or contrived, though I love dressing up the house with a touch of the unexpected."

The dining room holds a favored place in her heart. "It is a where good conversations and family time happens with home-cooked meals and fresh flowers." If she were a piece of furniture, Steph says, "I would be the foyer table in my new home because that is where I intend to put the aperitifs and hors d'oeuvres for guests visiting us. I want people to feel the warmth of our home and most importantly to feel comfortable and welcome there."

She pretty much conveys that hospitality without having to transform into a table. Her attentiveness and conversation reflect an inherent graciousness that brands her style. No doubt the new place will be just as welcoming and warm with a comfortable elegance that effortlessly comes together just like a natural woman. □



Long serpentine gown by
TONY EVAN; Royal Oak
 Selfwinding in 18 karat
 pink gold timepiece by
AUDEMARS PIGUET