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**147 Feature:** Where  
the Heart Is

**196 Feature:** Favorite  
Spaces

**212 Profile:** Jordana  
Valencia

**214 Profile:** Mark  
Tatum

**216 CEO Profile:** Mai  
Mai Cojuangco

**218 Arts & Culture:**  
Gavel & Block

**222 Charity:** Vicky  
Sycip Herrera  
Foundation





# A PICTURE OF BEAUTY

*Like the graceful social swans immortalized by Truman Capote—Babe Paley, Slim Keith, and CZ Guest—and also “new establishment” Manhattan muses such as Aerin Lauder, Tory Burch, and Marina Rusti, Swiss-Filipina Stephanie Kientle Gonzalez has orchestrated a life of gracious refinement and contemporary polish*

BY LEAH PUYAT  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BJ PASCUAL AND PAUL DEL ROSARIO  
MAKEUP BY RIA AQUINO / HAIR BY JAN EDROSOLAN

"Now it's time to party!" Exclaims Steph when she donned this feather and brocade number. She is in a rare moment of reverie, as her days are full and fulfilling. Of her evolution from young wife to mother she sums up: "More daily stress, more responsibilities but more perspective."

Pantsuit by LCP





"I hardly wear yellow but I'm all about pushing your style," she confesses. She brings a very real joie de vivre and savoir faire to her home, forged by her close family ties, innate curiosity, and passion for travel.

Dress by No.21 at Distinct



She favors neutral colors and a confluence of textures. "It's open and breezy. It's us," she says of her home. In another interview, she characterizes her home as a place where friends can feel comfortable enough to have "barefoot fun."



**G**OYA-ESQUE," captioned whip-smart lawyer and formidable woman of style Tunting Cruz Mattres when she posted an impressionistic style photo of Stephanie Kienle Gonzalez, in a flamenco pose at a glorious wedding set in Madrid. It was a particularly inspired union of image and word, as Goya is most famous for his twin "Las Majas, Desnuda y Vestida," and a *maja* is an 18th-19th century Madrileña known for wearing the colorful native dress, and in a proud manner. A more modern definition is one who is nice, attractive and good-looking, and there are few women as strikingly winsome as the radiant Steph, who makes being a wife, mother, entrepreneur, online lifestyle columnist, and now, a television co-host of *Metro Home*, look easy-breezy. As it is now expressed, she and her life are most definitely "#goals." The only discordant note in this visual metaphor is that Goya's *majas* are famous for their languorous reclining pose. And if there's one thing that Steph doesn't do, it's lie around and do nothing.

To wit: on the day of this magazine's cover shoot, BJ Pascual is shooting Stephanie for the cover and Paul Del

Rosario is shooting her home, which will all be integrated into one story. She also has to do interviews for *Metro*, style, this magazine, and then merch plugs for the Metro Channel. She then has to cross the metropolis for a construction site scouting for the newest branch of Philux, the furniture company founded by her parents, Max and Zaida Kienle, where she is currently the vice president for sales and development. Each shot for the magazine requires a change of hair and makeup and outfit, but Steph still manages to check on the home shots, as she points out corners and objects of interest. She quips, "With the interiors, I can see which angles might come out wrong." We counter, "What could possibly look wrong?"

In the midst of the flurry, she keeps the mood and the energy up. When I remind her of the time that I had met her and a dinner party we both attended, she reminds me, "But we were just at that shoot together, when we shot the place done by Cynthia! Thank you so much for giving me confidence that day!" I reply immediately that she is a natural interviewer and born to be on television, and she replies, "Do you really think so? I know that television magnifies everything, and I have to



C'est la vie. "My husband chooses most of the art, and I like to collaborate with various people on the lighting, the mirrors, the furniture. I wouldn't call it particularly any one style but it's more of how it feels." On the large ottoman Clooney, a Yorkie.





Words and pictures. "We do spend a lot of time watching movies together," Steph says of her young family. Books range the gamut of biography, history, art, fashion, design, and business.



"It's just another morning," Steph jokes as she styles the kitchen counter, perches ever so gracefully and then joking around with BJ Pascual who is a cherished friend and frequent creative ally.

Blazer and pants by Club Monaco, shoes by Bally

do less with my hands and my face!"

When she turns on the music, she sways a bit, does a little shimmy, and grooves as she smiles at BJ and says, "It's your shoot playlist!" When Anron Barrero, the editor-in-chief of *Metro Home* and her co-host on the show of the same title arrives, she exclaims warmly, "I'm so glad you're here!" She wants the interiors to be impeccably styled and photographed.

When it is close to lunch time, she even goes around to ask everyone if they prefer chicken or burgers. She has also laid out healthy snacks, candies, and chocolates, water, iced tea and lemonade, which are then replenished throughout the day. Her lovely daughters also pop in now and then, and they make everyone fall in love with them at first sight.

#### Young, Wild, and Free

The colors in her high-rise home are mostly neutral, but there is an air of adventure, and audacity in the way pieces have been juxtaposed.

"We are so connected to Africa; first, because my grandmother on my dad's side still lives there and my dad was born there. And then, Chris (her husband) and my girls just really love it there; we've gone as a family

and then for our anniversary, we went—just (the two of) us—to the border of Botswana and Tanzania. That particular trip would have been too dangerous for the girls. We do make it a point to take a trip, just us." In a past interview, Steph revealed that the untamed openness of the African plains stirs her heart and soul, and she revels in the sensation of being part of the magnificence of nature. And so, playful elephants cavort on a shell inlay chair; a flamboyance of flamingoes adorns the walls of her powder room; a pandemonium of parrots parades on a fabric that covers the doors that disguise her husband's "giant TV"; and a singular wild-boar skull rests on an armoire. Underfoot, animal hides add warmth and a camp-like feel to her foyer. Tribal stools replace a coffee table on her balcony, and books on Africa take pride of place on her shelves and console tables. One particularly massive book is the Peter Beard book. Beard is an almost mythical figure in the world of social history, fashion, and art. There is a Byronic air to him; he embodies the spirit of one who is mad, bad, and dangerous to know. He was born to an old East-Coast family and then married Minnie Cushing, an old-school heiress, who soon got tired of his prep school life and flew off to Africa. He famously invented the





"We matched the flowers in the dress to the table," Steph deadpans with perfect comedic timing. "I do like to do the table settings myself. We usually start off with a spiced corn soup, a recipe we got from a stay in Africa. Then we do a salad for people who don't do salads! It's got pancetta, blue cheese, the works! And then a magnificent lemon chicken. I love to cook but haven't done so in five years. But it's always my New Year's resolution to do it again."

Dress by Mark Bumgarner





Shelf aware: books, art, and the eye to put it all together.



All dressed up: "I love playing dress-up with my girls," admits Stech, and there is a bright gleam in her eyes as she recalls the times when her precious daughters join her in her dressing room. She once admitted in another interview that she always dreamt of having two girls who would be as close as she is to her sister, Jessica Kienzle-Maxwell.

Gown by Mark Bumpasser



"My sister and I collaborated closely on the design and proportions of this bed, and this is, in fact, the prototype. It's just special to have this piece in my home," Steph shares.

Dress by Rolo Laurent; pearl necklace by Jeweller



"I loved all the animal prints in my baby's nursery." Steph enthuses, and it's a wonder how this grown-up color combination comes off so whimsically and absolutely child appropriate, but still a space that can evolve and grow with a child.

story that supermodel Iman was a sheepherder to make her seem more exotic. He also romanced Lee Radziwill and many other beauties, but in the last few years, he has become more known for his audacious collages, assembled with his diary pages, photographs, and hand-written lines and bold swaths of paint.

"My husband Chris loves art and the more we fell in love with Africa, the more it made sense to add Peter Beard works to our collection. He's just a really cool guy and we both love what he does. We met him and his wife in New York, and he even gave our daughter Andrea a little book, which she reads almost every day."

"When people see our home, they usually say, 'It's so you!' or, that there's a warm sense to it. And that's exactly what it is. It's good that they can get a sense of who we are from our home. There's no one particular look, but more of a feeling. So there are touches from our travels, but also something very Filipino. And more importantly, this is a home for our girls."

#### AT EASE

With each shot, Steph confers on every detail with BJ. She says, "This isn't a fashion shoot, so no looking away and non-smiling shots." She prefers to take many different shots for each scenario, aware that it doesn't

always work on the first take. Regarding her new leap of faith as a television host, she admits, "I've always been a talker. I did have some doubts, I'll admit. The thing is, the show is about interiors, so in a way, it's not that much outside my comfort zone."

Often portrayed in her magazine features and cover shoots as impossibly and unattainably chic, Steph reveals, "People don't know that I'm in a dusty factory many days in a week! Or that I'm very self-deprecating. My dad has always been like that, and I got that from him." Asked to characterize her recent evolution, she says, "I like to think of myself as a constant work in progress: I am never stagnant. So while every year brings on more responsibilities, more daily stress, there's also more perspective."

Also in between each shot, Steph finds a way to bond with her girls. She delights in capturing little Ariel cooing with glee as she sits on the makeup chair and grabs the makeup brushes. She proudly tells us that four-year-old Andrea is on her way to a ballet recital, impossibly cute in her tutu.

"I'm scared of what I see on social media! What kind of world will my girls go into? And so my husband and I want them to develop a strong work ethic: to know how blessed they are and to love work. At the







"The color pink makes me smile because it is Andrea's favorite," Steph revealed to designer Cynthia Almarin in an episode of *Metro Home*.

same time, I want them to know who they are and how to embrace the flow of life." Lessons Andrea and Ariel will learn from their very own mother.

Though we are the ones who have invaded her home and cluttered her urban retreat with cameras and cables and our own inquisitive presence, she enthuses: "Thank you so much for spending the day in my home." The gratitude goes both ways. As I walked to a friend's place near our shoot, I felt a heightened appreciation for how the well-considered, well-planned, and beautifully crafted life can gladden the heart and enrich the soul. "Beauty will save the world," the Russian novelist Dostoevsky once wrote, and to revel in a life where one makes beautiful objects, so that many others can also craft their own private cocoons can be a participation in salvation.

Serendipitously enough, as the deadline for this story neared, I came across a Japanese word: *shokunin*. The writer Tasio Odare writes: "The Japanese word *shokunin* is defined by both Japanese and Japanese-English dictionaries as 'craftsman' or 'artisan' but such a literal description does not fully express the deeper meaning... It means not only having technical skills, but also implies an attitude and social consciousness. The obligation is both spiritual and material."

On the surface, it is easy to assume that a lady of Stephanie Kientle Gonzalez's beauty and style is blissfully and blithely gliding through life. But her meticulous devotion to each and every area of her life, from her passion for her work, to her deep love for her family, and to the attention she has lavished on her home can only be the natural result of good, old-fashioned hard work, discipline, and organization. They don't sound glamorous, but there's always grit behind the glitz. ■

**Q: What about design, art, and home décor do you love the most?**

A: It has something to do with the story behind the piece I'm attracted to, aside from its visual appeal.

**Q: How does your home décor reflect your personal style?**

A: It's classic with a twist of modern, and it's enriched by pieces with a story behind them.

**Q: What is the design style of your home?**

A: Our home contains a mix from our travels, stories, and our lifestyle. We've included touches of Africa just because we really love our trips there, and touches of the Philippines. Like I said, a lot of it is layered, and the inspiration is not just from one particular thing, but from collaborating on our family story.

**Q: Design-wise, what is your focal point?**

A: Each room has its own focal point and I look into form and function as well—not just how the room looks, but the purpose of the room.

**Q: What are the first things people notice when they step in?**

A: I think they notice that it's bright but it has a lot of green, I've always wanted that in our apartment, something bright and fresh. Really bringing the outdoors in is important to me, that was one of the things that I wanted to highlight.

**Q: As a family, what is your favorite place to hang out in?**

A: My kids and husband would say the TV room, for obvious reasons, but I'd like to say, my closet because I like to play dress up with my two little girls.

**Q: From experience, what has been the best way to merge fashion and function?**

A: As I am a mom, function has become more important to me. It's a lot more than how a piece looks but how you feel when you wear it.

**Q: What about this place makes it feel like home?**

A: My two little girls and my husband, of course, and all the little accessories that they leave behind.



An urban garden is a cherished getaway and best of all, Clooney, her "first baby" loves it!

Dress by Sandro; shoes by Balby