

Foreign affair

Elements collected from round the world contribute to the colourful, multilayered interiors of this stylish family house in Adliya





In the drawing room, a sequined Moroccan wedding blanket covers the back of the sofa; the black-and-white ikat cushions are designed by Federica. On the coffee table are a black-and-white bowl from H & M Home and a jewellery box with an eye-motif inlaid lid by Yalla Habibi. The pair of stools is covered in geometric-print cut velvet



THIS PAGE The study area, located in the hall at the foot of the stairs, has an embroidered shawl which Federica mounted on a wooden frame and hung on the wall. A red suzani with floral-motif embroidery is positioned under the printer. The rug, from India, grounds the scheme



Despite stocking their homes with personal belongings, some tenants never fully exorcise the impersonality that defines much rented accommodation. This might be because they are not that interested in decorating, or because the rented quarters are just too bland, or too plain awkward, to allow these tenants' imaginations to take flight. In stark contrast to this is the rented house of Federica Asack, which represents a master class in imaginative, characterful design.

Giving a rented house personality and charm is second nature to this Italian interior designer. As the child of a man who worked in the military, Federica and her family moved house frequently, and her marriage to an American has ensured that her married life, too, involves frequent relocations overseas.

Federica studied interior design in her thirties after the birth of her three children. In 2015, while living in the US, she set up Masseria Chic Interior Design. Since moving to Bahrain last August, she has continued her design work, which she describes as a combination of "instinct and training".

Her children, she says, are "my hardest clients". Moving to a new country, she usually lets them choose their bedroom paint colours. "For this move, my younger daughter chose pink for her bedroom walls. When I walked into the newly painted room, it felt like I'd stepped into a grapefruit," Federica recalls. Embracing the pink, Federica paired the mauve-pink walls with warm, apricot-pink curtains and other accessories, including a vibrant suzani, and the effect is charming and playful.

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Her elder daughter's bedroom is more grown up, but retains the same playful quality. The rug is set at an angle because, "In children's rooms, you can break the rules and it looks cute." In her son's bedroom, the bed is positioned in the corner – "it was the only thing he asked for, no colour preferences, just the bed in the corner" – and Federica re-imagined an old door as the bed head.

Throughout this family's house in Adliya are examples of clever re-imaginings and interesting juxtapositions. Each room contains a thoughtfully arranged assemblage of objects collected from round the world. There are bone-inlay cabinets, bought for Federica by her husband, surmounted by Italian ceramics and inlaid Syrian boxes. Shaggy fur throws and sequined Moroccan wedding blankets are

THIS PAGE In the hall (top), a pair of demilune tables surmounted by blue-and-white jars flanks the entrance to the blue-painted television room. The sitting room (below) contains a vintage armchair bought in the US, with an embroidered cushion from Babushka in Seef Mall



thrown over sofas and wing chairs; suzani from Uzbekistan and embroidered textiles from India hang on the walls. Such is Federica's skill that this colourful, international stew is neither hectic nor jarring – the effect is harmonious and pretty. There is plenty to look at and admire, but viewed as a whole, Federica's richly layered interiors are serene.

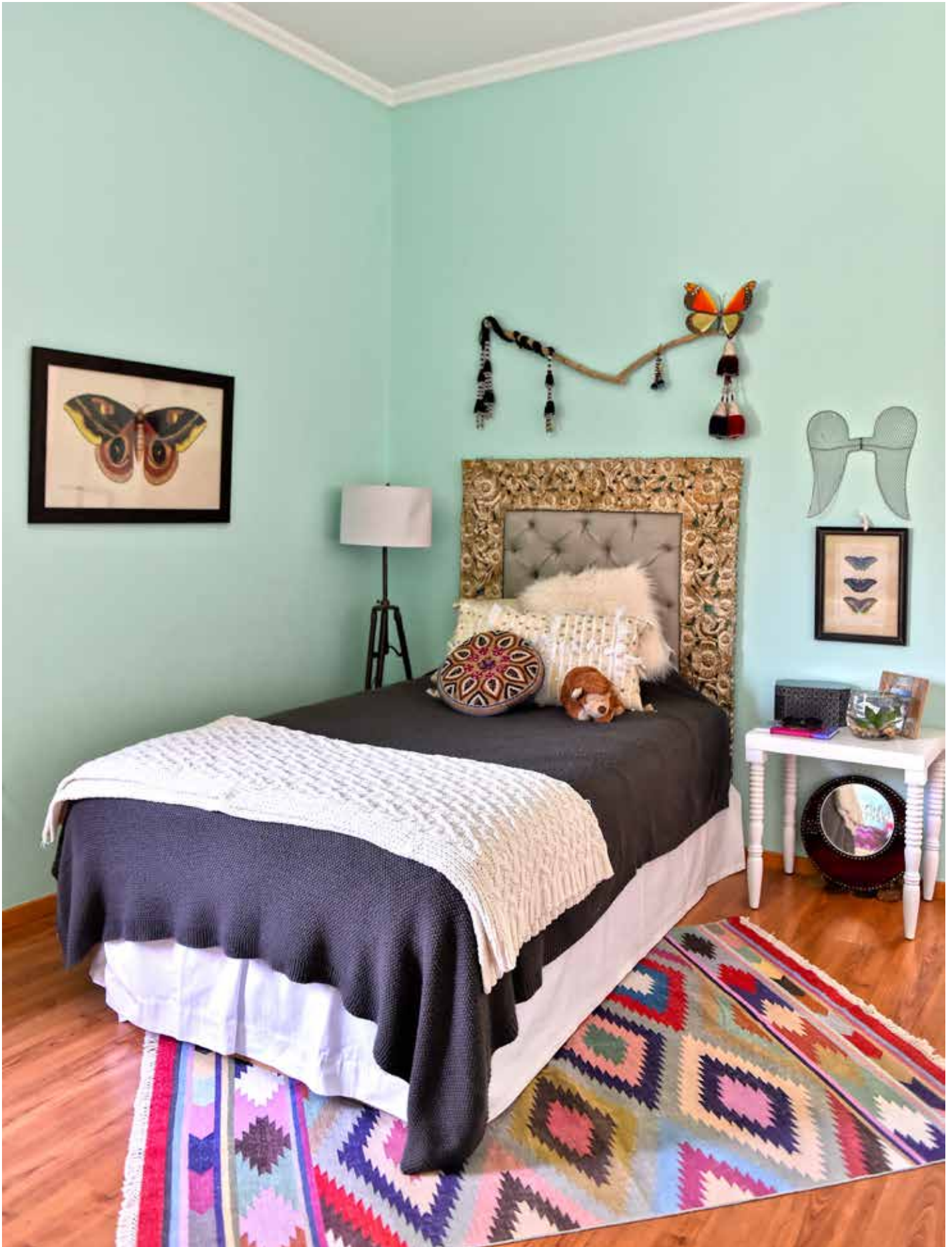
"The renter's challenge is that you cannot change architecture or hardware," she says. In this house, Federica has masked the ugly window on the staircase with a simple length of diaphanous, printed cotton, to airy effect. She has painted the walls throughout, too, and mixes "high with low" – fine porcelain by Herend alongside a china bowl from H&M Home, for example – but usually against an unobtrusive background. "I love a neutral background – mushroom walls, cream-covered chairs – overlaid with pattern and texture."

Much of this colour and texture is supplied by beautiful textiles. The black-and-white ikat cushions on the pale sofa were made up to her own design, and there is Indian embroidery on other cushions and even wrapped round a vase containing flowers. "It's an Indian purse," she says. "I didn't want it to be hidden in the cupboard."

Upstairs, stretched on a wooden frame on the wall of her younger daughter's bedroom, is a hot-pink embroidered suzani. "I love suzani and being here, in Bahrain, we are closer to Uzbekistan than we were

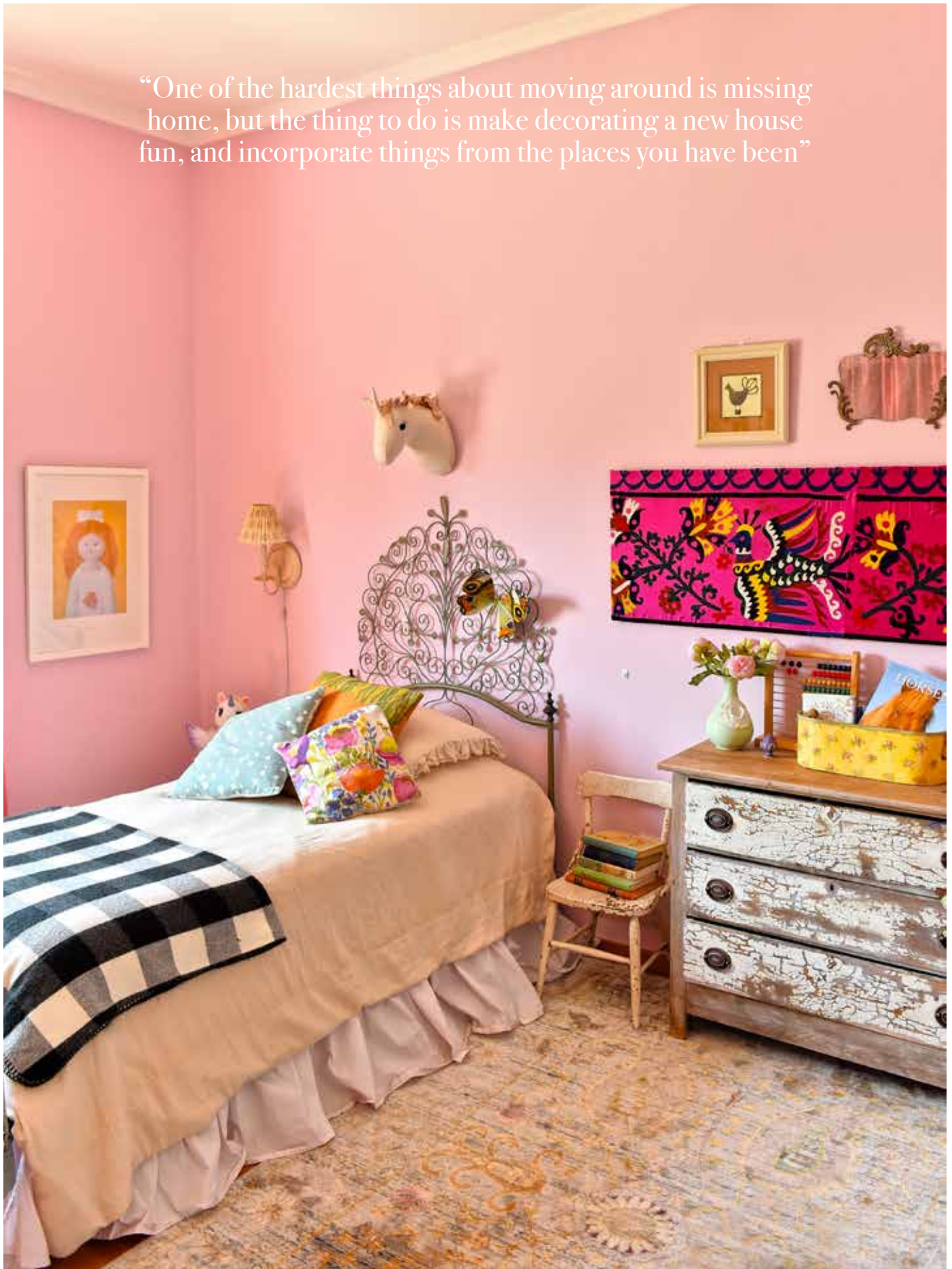


THIS PAGE Italian pottery and painted glass form part of a tablescape in the sitting room (top). Above the drinks trolley in the dining room (below) are various pictures and carvings, including a pair of Indian scenes in relief, which Federica has mounted simply on black mat, both unframed and without glass. The adjoining sitting room is painted one shade lighter than the mushroom-coloured dining room



ABOVE This bedroom, belonging to Federica's elder daughter, has a bed head made from a carved-rosewood picture frame; Federica filled the space inside with padded, buttoned linen. The tribal rug was bought in Bahrain. Above the bed hangs a piece of wood from Virginia, which supports the daughter's collection of locally made tassels

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ABOVE In the younger daughter's bedroom, Federica hung an antique suzani on the wall - bought in Adliya, the suzani is stretched on a wooden frame. The unicorn head is from Target in the US



in the States. Suzanis are unique, dyed with natural dyes and handmade by families for their daughters. This example has damage – it's antique, and there are holes and marks – but there is a huge amount of love in each one."

Holes and scuffs are embraced in this house – "many old, damaged things have life in them," Federica says. She credits her love of imperfect treasures to her grandmother, who had an antiques shop. "My mother and grandmother had exquisite taste, and they liked old things. I suppose I learnt by osmosis. One of the hardest things about moving around is missing home, but the thing to do is make decorating a new house fun, and incorporate things from the places you have been."

She wants to pass on this idea to her children. Her elder daughter has begun collecting locally made tassels, which she hangs above her bed from a piece of wood found in Virginia. Thus Arab tassels and American timber hang over a bed head made from a carved, Indian picture frame and "filled" in Bahrain with buttoned, padded linen. By any standard, this room is full of personality – just like the rest of this imaginatively decorated, rented house. **AH**



THIS PAGE ABOVE In her son's bedroom, Federica positioned the bed in the corner, at his request. The bed head is constructed from an old door. BELOW The reading nook is hung with paper decorations and cosy with colourful cushions (right). The door to the bedroom (left) is decorated with paper flowers bought from Target; Federica twisted them into a wreath shape