

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PENELOPE

CARI GIANNOULIAS is a renowned interior designer, known for her refined and harmonious designs. Her work is characterised by a deep appreciation for artisanal materials, natural textures, and timeless aesthetics. Giannoulas draws
INSPIRATION FROM BOTH CLASSICAL AND MODERN STYLES,
skillfully weaving them together to create spaces that exude tranquillity and warmth.



and outdoor spaces. Privacy is ensured through green filters and the clever positioning of windows and doors. Inside, the aesthetic is a celebration of simplicity and craftsmanship. Walls and floors are finished with the traditional 'patiti,' a hand-applied plaster technique that gives the house a weathered, timeless look. Mirrorless walls ensure that the natural surroundings take center stage. Natural materials such as wood, stone, and linen enhance the feeling of serenity and connect the house with its environment. The colours are neutral and earthy, contributing to the calm atmosphere that embodies slow living.

UNITY BETWEEN INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

The outdoor space of the house is just as important as the interior. The terrace and garden are designed to fully embrace the Mediterranean climate. A lush garden with aromatic herbs, olive trees, and local plants surrounds the house, providing an oasis of peace. The pool, inspired by the hues of the sea, blends seamlessly into the natural surroundings. The design emphasises outdoor living. The house features multiple outdoor seating areas, a tennis court, and expansive vegetable gardens. Large windows and sliding doors allow the interior to spill out into the outdoor spaces, creating a sense of continuity between the interior and nature. The house already has a long history in the family. During the pandemic, the family spent an extended period in Crete while their children attended school remotely.

GIANNOULIAS SAYS HER VACATION RETREAT IS A REFUGE WHERE HER LOVE FOR SLOW LIVING AND GREEK HERITAGE COME TOGETHER

Her projects, ranging from urban lofts to Mediterranean retreats, reflect her love for authentic materials and attention to detail. One of her most personal projects is her vacation retreat in Crete, Greece. This house, located in the picturesque Agios Mattheos, is an oasis of peace, surrounded by a beautiful Mediterranean landscape with olive trees and fragrant herbs. Giannoulas says it is her favourite place on earth; a refuge where her love for slow living and Greek heritage come together. For Giannoulas, her vacation house in Crete is more than just a place to escape the

bustle of everyday life. The house reflects not only her style and philosophy but also her deep connection to Greece. Her husband, after all, has Greek roots; his parents came from small villages in Crete, and he spent his summers in Chania. For Giannoulas, the city quickly became a second home. They got married on site, baptised their children at the local church, and gradually spent more time in the surroundings. The house ultimately became a way to solidify their connection to the region and was designed in traditional Greek style with a modern twist. For the design, Cari Giannoulas tapped into her 'inner Penelope.' Just like the ancient Greek heroine Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, wove tapestries while awaiting her beloved's return, Giannoulas weaves together the elements of her design with care and craftsmanship,

ultimately creating a house that embodies her personal history, the culture of Crete, and the timeless beauty of nature. This house, built with authentic materials and a deep appreciation for craftsmanship, is thus her 'tapestry' of the 21st century – a masterpiece that will stand the test of time. The architecture is inspired by the characteristic whitewashed houses of the region and is further nuanced by a contemporary interpretation. The structure is arranged in a 'U' shape, creating a central courtyard that fosters a sense of intimacy. The openings in the house are strategically placed to ensure optimal light and to create a seamless transition between indoor





This deepened their connection to the island, and the house gradually became more of a second home rather than just a vacation retreat. It offers the perfect balance between proximity to family and friends in Chania and the tranquility of the countryside. Giannoulas designed the house with the future in mind. While it currently functions as a vacation home, she expects that over the years, it will evolve and gradually become a permanent residence. The design has been deliberately kept timeless, with a flexible layout that can adapt to the changing needs of her family.

FOR GIANNOULIAS, THIS HOUSE IS MORE THAN JUST A PROJECT; IT IS HER LIFE'S WORK AND AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

Building a house on an island brought unique challenges, but for Giannoulas, it was an opportunity to let her creativity flow. Instead of selecting ready-made materials from a showroom, she went directly to the mountain regions to select the right type of stone. The stones were hand-worked using ancient methods, without lasers or advanced technology, but with simple nails and threads as guides. Sustainability was another important consideration. The house uses solar energy for electricity and hot water, and all the materials used are natural and eco-friendly. From the hand-carved wooden beams to the ceramic tiles and linen upholstery, every element contributes to a harmonious and authentic living experience. Designing a house from a distance was one of the greatest challenges for Giannoulas. Much of the project was carried out



through online communication with architects and craftsmen. Over the course of a year, the designs were continuously adjusted and refined to create not only a visually appealing house but also a place that truly felt like home. Additionally, learning to navigate Greek building regulations was a process in itself. The way of working was very different from what she was used to in the United States, and it required patience and adaptability to bring the project to a successful conclusion. For Giannoulas, this house is more than just a project; it is a life's work and an investment in the future. It is a place where her family can come together, where memories are created, and where time seems to slow down. The combination of traditional Greek elements and modern

comfort creates a unique living experience that captures the essence of Crete. 'This project was transformative for me,' says Giannoulas. 'It renewed my appreciation for the simplicity of life and the significance of deep connections. This house will be cherished for generations, a place filled with memories and friendships.'

With this summer house in Crete, Cari Giannoulas has not only created a refuge but also a tribute to the Mediterranean way of life. It is a place where nature, architecture, and personal history merge, and where the beauty of slow living is felt in every corner. (Text: Laurane Daerden)

FOR THE DESIGN, CARI GIANNOULIAS TAPPED INTO HER 'INNER PENELOPE'



Photography by Helen Cathcart, styling by Samia Pell