

a HOME THAT OPENS to *the* ISLAND

Set on the wooded hillsides of Agios Mattheos, just beyond the harbor town of Chania, interior designer Cari Giannoulis has created a retreat where land, light, and memory come together. Surrounded by olive trees, vegetable gardens, and sweeping views of the sea, this hillside hideaway is a deeply personal space—one that honors her husband’s Greek roots while offering a contemporary take on slow island living.

Agios Mattheos is known for its natural beauty—where wooded slopes look out over the White Mountains, Souda Bay, and the Cretan Sea. A quiet spot favored by local families for their summer homes, it offers a rare balance of seclusion and proximity to Chania, the beloved seaside town that has long anchored Cari’s family life. “We were married there, baptized our children there,” she says. “Chania was always home.”

Both of Cari’s husband’s parents are from Greece—his father from a tiny village called Mazeka, and his mother from Asfendiou, near Chania in the Sfakia region. He spent his childhood summers traveling across the country, but it was Chania that felt most like home. When he introduced Cari to the city, she fell in love with it instantly. Over time, the idea of building a home there became more than a dream. During the pandemic, the family relocated to Crete, overseeing construction and enjoying a slower pace of life together.





JUST BEYOND CHANIA,
A STONE HOUSE
OPENS TO LIGHT,
STILLNESS,
AND THE RHYTHMS
OF NATURE



LIVING WITH THE LAND

The house follows a traditional "Π"-shaped layout, centered around a private courtyard and swimming pool. Built from local stone, the home sits low and unobtrusively on the slope, in tune with Crete's rugged terrain. Large, minimal-framed openings dissolve boundaries between interior and exterior. Outdoor life was key to the design brief—from shaded seating nooks and a Mediterranean garden to a tennis court tucked discreetly into the landscape.





A FEELING, NOT JUST A FLOOR PLAN

Cari drew inspiration from traditional village homes—layered, simple, and full of soul. “Each house told its story through objects—komboloi, icons, things passed down. I knew we couldn’t recreate that exactly, but I wanted to carry that spirit.”

Inside, the palette is warm and neutral, designed to calm the senses and frame the view. “We purposely gave the home floor-to-ceiling windows so the outside was the focal point,” Cari notes. “Even the bathrooms don’t have mirrors. Instead, you see the sea, the garden, the sky.”

There’s a softness to the architecture—curved corners, custom fixtures, wabi-sabi details—that modernize the Cretan vernacular without diluting its soul. Materials were chosen with intention and patience: stone sourced directly from the mountains, walls finished in hand-applied patiti plaster, pergolas built with hand-cut beams. Solar panels now power the home. Linen, ceramic, cotton, marble, wood, rattan, leather, and metal define a palette that feels grounded and timeless.



DESIGNING FOR HERSELF

Though based in the U.S., Cari and her family moved to Crete during the pandemic to oversee construction. “In the States, materials are endless,” she says. “Here, it’s about working with what’s around you—and that was freeing.” The process unfolded through remote conversations with architects, sketches, and long reflections on how the home should feel. “It was easy in some ways,” she says, “but deeply considered. We designed it for how we live now, and also for what’s ahead.”

A HOME THAT HOLDS HISTORY

The result is a home that doesn’t just sit on the land, but speaks to it. A place where sea views replace screens, where memory is built into the walls, and where every space leaves room for what’s to come.