

FARMA KARMA

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Nathalie Farman-Farma's Chelsea home tells the tale of a Parisienne, married to an Iranian, with a fascination for the Orient. This tale is woven with the threads of a vast array of fabrics ranging in provenance from Russia to Persia to Uzbekistan. Believing that every fabric possesses a different story, Nathalie has developed a dialogue between the various patterns and colours that adorn her home, likening her treatment of fabrics to the way one might approach art. Why not decorate your home with fabrics as you might with art?

Outlining the way in which the decorating world has become polarized between the curated, "minimal" style redolent of a luxury hotel room, sanitised and sombre in various shades of grey, and the rarer, eclectic style of those more interested in spending time selecting fabrics, she believes that there is a niche for more expression within fabric. Her home acts as a testament to this belief. Nathalie professes, "I really believe in loving your home, putting yourself into it and above all making yourself feel at home in it." She describes her own style as very French with orientalist "Scheherazaderies," which is certainly suggested by the combination of traditional old world furniture and Central Asian-inspired accents, for example an 18th Century French banquette reupholstered in a traditional Russian-inspired fabric.

Formerly of Tissus Tartares, Nathalie has just launched Décors Barbares, which will allow her to extend her creativity beyond the *tissus*. The original motivation behind Nathalie's foray into interiors came as a result of the lack of availability of Central Asian-inspired fabrics. Unable to source the fabrics that she wanted, she decided to start making her own. Sitting in her living room at home, she gestures to the needlepoint rug, an example of one of the ways in which she plans to expand her range of interiors under Décors Barbares. Although Nathalie has only been designing professionally for the last 5 years, her style is one that has been in gestation for much longer. As a child, Nathalie had

a Russian family friend who had escaped at the time of the revolution and travelled to San Francisco. This "babushka" figure introduced her to Russian storybooks, the beginning of what would become a deep fascination with Russian graphics. The walls of her dining room are decorated with framed textiles, originally part of Natalia de Shabelsky's collection (most of which can now be viewed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York or in St. Petersburg), which provide the perfect accompaniment to the antique Russian curtain draped over the dining room table.

Nathalie is extremely influenced by traditional folk costume and harbours a deep nostalgia for the individuality that seems to have disappeared along with its extinction. Her interiors revive this folk tradition, exemplified by the curtains in her sitting room whose pattern she extracted from the lining of a Turkmen robe belonging to the cousin of her husband, Amir Farman-Farma. Nathalie also incorporates elements of original antique costumes into her home, as exemplified by her collection of pillows that she fashioned out of old Romanian blouses and Hungarian skirts.

Nathalie describes herself as an "armchair explorer" taking much of her inspiration from her library of books, mostly obtained from ethnographic museums. She also draws inspiration from the collections of the Museum of Printed Textiles in Mulhouse and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, along with other archives based in Lyon and St. Gallen. Her treatment of interiors is very much a celebration of the life of fabrics and their history. Nathalie is interested in the dialogue not only between fabrics, but also within the design of a single fabric. What she loves about design is the circular humanity of it, the journey of the fabric itself and its ability to establish a connection to another culture and period: "I like the fact that my fabrics blend in so easily with the old." Nathalie's interiors are reminiscent of a bygone era. "That's part of the challenge," she suggests, "to make them feel like documents."













