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ISLAND PARADISE

*From feng shui to farming olives, **Sheela Levy's**
Mallorca home is designed to inspire*

Words by ELEANOR JOSLIN
Photography by NATXO BASSOLS

SHOT EXCLUSIVELY FOR HARPER'S BAZAAR INTERIORS, ON THE SON NAUVA ESTATE IN MALLORCA.
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTED BY NICO SANZO. SHEELA WEARS BUNGALOW 8 DRESS AND MAX MARA BANGLE

"SELLING THE BODY SHOP FRANCHISES GAVE ME
THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO DO WHAT I WAS
MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT — DESIGNING AND
DECORATING HOMES"

Sheela Levy, entrepreneur





The ambient
Mallorcan weather
allows for al fresco
living all year round



Huge pots from
Thailand watch
over the stunning
swimming pool

She may joke that it was the housekeeper's incredible carrot cake that lured her to buy this idyllic finca in Mallorca, but interior designer and entrepreneurial businesswoman Sheela Levy is making profitable use of the island's bountiful lands.

While she and husband Ivan made their name turning The Body Shop into an award-winning brand in Switzerland with international influence, thanks to statement window dressing, clever seasonal merchandising and a natural flair for design, in recent years they've spearheaded a number of diverse projects that are proving equally fruitful.

From the highest certified organic olive oil and home-grown almond products to Feng Shui interiors and property development, their home in the Son Naava estate has become a sustainable business in many ways.

"I am so proud of our blossoming olive grove that my husband and I have nurtured into a brand that stands for everything we believe in – organic, natural living and great quality," says Sheela. Their Demeter-certified organic olive oil range is produced from 2,500 alperquina olive trees they planted when they bought the 25-acre property five years ago. It was a profitable idea; they now sell over 10,000 bottles to gourmet restaurants and delicatessens in Mallorca, Switzerland and China. "Demeter is not only the most esteemed organic certification awarded, but it's also a holistic approach to agriculture," she adds.

Holism has become an integral aesthetic of her eponymous interior design practice, Sheela Levy Interiors, which implements the theory of Feng Shui with energising results – this serene five-bedroom finca is just one example of her work. Since 2012, she's quickly built up an international portfolio, with completed projects in New York, Mallorca, Mumbai, London and Barcelona.

Earlier this year she and Ivan also set up their own property development company CocoSage, which will launch officially in the autumn. "We have started buying old homes with character and history in Palma and we are now beginning the refurbishment, dabbling these blank canvases with colour, texture and energy before putting them on the market," says the entrepreneur. They have several projects underway, including the refurbishment of two houses in Calatrava, with beautiful gardens and terraces.

It's only since selling their 50-store franchise of The Body Shop in ►





Sheela wears Diane von Fürstenberg dress and Bungalow 8 necklace; her daughter Shaana Levy-Bahl wears Raquel Allegre dress, ring made bespoke by Ernst Loosli

2010, which the couple had grown from a single store in 1983, that they have been able to focus on their shared passion for property development and Sheela's flair for interior design.

In the early '80s their friends living in the Middle East urged them to bring a new and exciting franchise over from Britain. Having become a frequent shopper at The Body Shop on King's Road in London, they pledged their case to the founding partners Gordon and Anita Roddick. It turned out that the Middle East franchises were taken; Switzerland, however, was not. The couple moved to Ivan's native country and employed statement visual merchandising tactics that turned their shop beneath a hairdressers into a phenomenon. Soon after moving she found out she was pregnant with their daughter, Shaana Levy-Bahl. The smell of the store's fragrances made her extremely nauseas, she laughs, recalling how hard those early weeks were, having to decant large bottles of perfume oil into smaller ones. However, it couldn't have been too much of a hindrance, as success – and more stores – soon followed.

"We were so particular about how our stores looked," she says. "I set up an in-house decorating department and hired qualified window dressers who made a statement. We created soap opera windows with velvet curtains and piles of soaps; Batman wearing eye masks to coincide with the release of the film. I changed the colours of collections seasonally, including the packaging and ribbons; everything had to be exceptional, from uniforms to the displays.



The house came with a number of chairs, which Sheela has restored and upholstered

"I LOVE CREATING ECLECTIC, WARM, CONTEMPORARY SPACES THAT FEEL MORE LIKE SUBLIME RETREATS AND SANCTUARIES THAN JUST HOMES"

Sheela Levy, entrepreneur

We were creative, different and – most importantly – we got noticed. We won every visual merchandising award year after year and became an inspiration to other franchises around the world."

In 2010 they sold their businesses to Coop Switzerland, and two years later she left her role as creative director. "This gave me the perfect opportunity to do what I was most passionate about – designing and decorating homes. After spending thirty years visually merchandising and re-merchandising 50 stores seasonally, and moving and redecorating my own homes 25 times, I realised I had an innate talent and eye for space management, colour combinations and design."

Feng Shui has become a signature part of her aesthetic. She became passionate about Chinese

Face Reading and Feng Shui when she was designing a restaurant in London in 1989, and enrolled on a two-year course at the Imperial School of Feng Shui under the tutelage of Kajal Sheth. "She was an enthralling teacher and I became obsessed with the subject. She continues to be an important part of my life and wisdom while doing up all my homes."

One project she had fortuitous influence on was their own home in Eaton Place, London. "This was a run-down garden apartment that we transformed from an old fashioned, chintzy, dilapidated, dark space with small rooms, to a large, light, contemporary, warm and inviting space. We created a fabulous space with high ceilings, a light wooden Mafi Floor, a fabulous Bulthaup kitchen, and large glass windows overlooking the garden. When we ►



An old door bought locally, distressed and then oiled, creates a magnificent coffee table

sold Eaton Place to move back to Zurich a few years later, Kajal gave us an auspicious time to put the house on the market. It sold within three weeks at the asking price!”

While the couple have multiple properties in Mumbai and Zurich, “Son Naava is my creative home where I come for instant bliss,” she says. Nestled in the agricultural heart of the island just outside Montuiri, the area is known for its rich history and even richer soils. “The quality of life is amazing here,” says Sheela, gazing out across the sun-dappled vista of manicured gardens, undulating olive groves and lush green hills. Mallorca possesses a feeling of “perfect tranquillity” – a sentiment shared by Rafael Nadal and Robert Graves. She praises many of the island’s idyllic attributes, from the beautiful Balearic capital Palma with its breathtaking cathedrals and architecture to the abundance of golf courses (27), beach coves (350) and gourmet restaurants – seven of which boast Michelin stars. No wonder *The Times* voted Palma the best city in the world to live in April. The Levys are adding to the local culinary scene with plans to open a café, using produce they’ve grown themselves. This is part of a larger CocoSage development comprising of four apartments, a penthouse with 360-degree views of the coast and town, plus a café, bakery and restaurant.

Originally built by the Swarovski family as a real-estate development, their 500-square-metre, five-bedroom villa with sweeping gardens is a Zen of calm and tranquillity. “When we bought this finca its Feng Shui showed a lot of Earth Energy – most houses on a north-east/south-west axis tend to have this,” she says, “which meant that the house was ‘stuck’. Colour-wise, the house needed a lot of greys, silvers, gold and white to energise it.

“In reality, there are no quick fixes and Feng Shui only works when the person wants a real holistic, overall change in every aspect of their life,” she adds. “Essentially, it is about understanding the energy that surrounds the client at home, and finding ways to strengthen and improve that energy so their space exudes a supportive atmosphere. Whether it’s to enhance one’s career, love, or health, Feng Shui is a personalised science. It is definitely not about hanging a chime in a corner or putting a mirror in another! It’s a lot more than that; you have to look at the whole picture.”

The neutral colour palette, slate flooring, elements of reclaimed wood and soft upholstery create a soothing ambience. The villa is furnished with Moooi, B&B Italia, The White Company, Missoni, Tribu, Lizzo and Nobilis; rugs come from Morocco, lamps from Switzerland, cushions from Bali; many of Sheela’s own designs are in place, too, which have been brought to life by a local carpenter. The couple are avid art collectors and currently have on display a number of large, black-and-white photographs from Rohit Chawla, a photographer they know in India.

The door to the al fresco cinema is 200 years old, reclaimed from a salvage yard with handles added from Marrakech



They spray-painted a large French dining table they inherited from their predecessors and a gold chandelier in black and reupholstered the dining chairs in black fabric. The beds were changed to Duxiana with headboards and cushions covered in Ikat fabric made in Santa Maria.

Outside, the pool casita was renovated with a cement day bed in the same light terracotta colour of the house. Sheela placed a large mirror behind the daybed to reflect the water for good Feng Shui. “Mirrors and water signify money and have to be treated with great reverence when being placed,” she says. “I built an additional cement seating area on the south side that I call my ‘chai’ area. This is where I watch the incredible sunsets we have in Mallorca, when the sky turns different shades of golden yellow and burnt orange. Everyone who visits comments on how incredibly calm and peaceful the energy feels.

“However, I am most proud of the amazing outdoor cinema and the fabulous long terrace, where we all spend time, reading, relaxing, working... Its feels like a Zen sanctuary there.” No doubt her daughter and son-in-law Uraaz Bahl, who are both film producers, appreciate this al fresco cinematic enclave. The gardens were enlarged and landscaped with palm trees around

the entrance and pool, and lots of white flowers such as bougainvillea and white oleanders. “I chose to have all the flowers in white to add a sense of peace and calm. I also brought over 25 beautiful, distressed grey and cream pots from Thailand and filled them with white flowers that I change seasonally, as well as the cushions, artwork and interior paint. This comes from all those years merchandising The Body Shop stores, and changing the look seasonally, just like the fashion industry.”

Old habits are hard to break, it seems. But if making seasonal changes to the look of her interior projects leads to the same success as The Body Shop, Sheela Levy Interiors promises to become another multi-award-winning business in her creative portfolio. Watch this Feng Shui-ed space... ■

Sheela transforms a suitcase into a chair using Ikat fabric from Santa Maria





Above: Behind the Tribu sun loungers the Levy's alberquina olive trees sprawl across the hillside. Right: The Swarovski's French dining table and chandelier spray-painted black. Left: Ikat textiles and photography from Rohit Chawla's book *Wanderlust* create a corner of calm. Below: A Buddha head adds Zen to the outdoor dining area

