

# Collector's item

The Jumeirah villa of artist **Kate Toledo** is filled with curios, all of which tell a vibrant story

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Photographs: Muthu Kumar



Artist Kate Toledo's Jumeirah villa has the feel of an Aladdin's Cave meets art gallery. Sculptures of three wise monkeys sit on the front door step, while a playful crocheted otter by Shauna Richardson, a series of portraits by Japanese artist Tomoko Sawada and side tables adorned with finds from Portugal and Brazil are among the treasures that greet visitors upon entering her home. Every wall demands attention and, in preparation for a forthcoming exhibition, Kate's own vibrant paintings are stacked up on the floors, leaning against the hallway walls.

Born in Tanzania, Kate grew up in Africa and New Zealand. She spent 20 years in Brazil, where she met her husband, Dr Luiz Toledo, a renowned plastic surgeon, before they settled in the Middle East in 2006. The couple now split their time between Dubai and Lisbon, and travel regularly for work.

For someone with such an international upbringing, a location's sense of history plays an important role in where Kate calls home. "I love this neighbourhood. It might not be as old as Deira, but it's an older part of Dubai and the villa is well constructed, with solid walls and marble floors."

Kate found her move from the world's 12<sup>th</sup> largest city (by population), São Paulo, to Dubai incredibly calming. "We initially chose this area so our daughters would be close to Jumeirah College, but it's also a good location for amenities. I shop at Mercato Mall daily – it's a quintessentially Dubai place – and I enjoy walking the dog in this neighbourhood. I always prefer to live in a town environment, like this one, rather than suburbia."

It's a totally different way of life to her experience in Brazil, where she doesn't let her children outside the property for fear of their safety and it was difficult to move around due to the sheer number of people. However, there are similarities between São Paulo and Dubai. "Religion is a very strong part of daily life in both cities," she says. Meanwhile, her other home, in Lisbon, has an Islamic connection. "We live in a 300-year-old building in one of Lisbon's oldest areas, Alfama. It's an Arabic-influenced neighbourhood, with skinny streets and women cooking sardines on the footpaths to avoid their tiny apartments smelling of fish."

With her sense of rootlessness, Kate finds an affinity with the UAE, which not only offers a home to a huge number of expats, but to those who are unlikely to stay long-term due to the country's visa requirements. "There's a sense that most of us are passing through Dubai – there's nowhere else quite like it because you can settle in most other places until you die."

Kate also, however, appreciates seeing the development of Dubai. "There aren't many places that go through such an incredible amount of change in such a short space of time. The pace of construction here is incredible – I feel very honoured to witness it. State funding for fields, such as the arts, doesn't seem to be so much of an issue in the UAE as in most other places, either."

Reflecting her values, nearly every item in Kate's homes is handpicked, salvaged, given or inherited.





“Everything in the house has some kind of history,” she explains. “Most of our purchases are made on our travels; they are old things that aren’t easily available; and they make a statement to me.”

Like many artists, she is a collector. “My husband says that if you have more than three, it’s a collection,” she muses. Her collections include inlaid wooden boxes with a scene of Pão de Açúcar [Sugarloaf Mountain] in Rio de Janeiro, which are no longer made; metal mugs picked up on various travels; art, books and propaganda materials from Mao Zedong’s era (she has a fascination with dictators); Murano glass from the ’50s; African masks; Portuguese faience as well as pre-Columbian pottery.

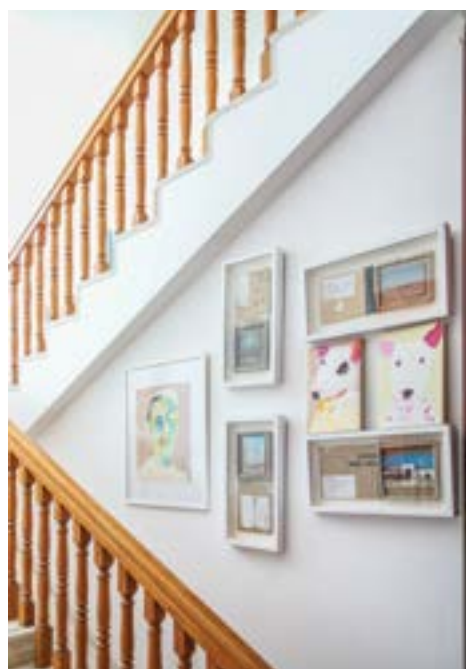
A tour of Kate’s home is like a tour of an exhibition by its curator, accompanied by the vivid stories of where each curio has come from and how it has found its place in her home. Among the huge

variety of pieces, from different places and eras, there are rugs from Africa, numerous books and prints of New Zealand landscapes by an English artist that she has inherited from her parents; a Chinese collection that includes a painting of laughing faces, ancient porcelain that was once shipped around the world, and intricately carved furniture bought from a Chinese lady before she returned to her home country; and cushions featuring prints of Kate’s own designs.

We complete our tour in Kate’s entrance, marvelling at Shauna Richardson’s piece. “When you enter the door and see this sprightly otter jumping for joy,” she says. “You can’t help thinking that life isn’t that bad.”

*The Portuguese Collection by Kate Toledo runs until Thursday 30 November, ProArt Gallery, Palm Strip Mall, [katetoledo.com](http://katetoledo.com)*

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**HOME COMFORTS**

**My aesthetic is...**  
 Decorative, colourful and comfortable.  
**I use my home for...**  
 Displaying the things that I love.  
**Lighting is key.**  
 Layer it to create the right mood.  
**Home is...**  
 Where I hang my hat.