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Turn the tables on cookie-cutter homes

Marianna Piccolo and Arianna Posenato co-founded their homeware e-store as a result of their professional and personal journeys respectively. An interior architect who has lived in the Middle East for the past decade, Piccolo says: "As an Italian and an aesthete who belongs to two generations of craftsmen, I felt the necessity to source high-quality homeware for my local UAE market."

Fellow Italian Posenato, on the other hand, dreamt of opening her own store after she was put off by the lack of variety in homeware when she was trying to fit out her flat in Abu Dhabi. "I began to scour the internet for distinct, handmade accessories. Piece by piece, my home became more personal; a place that speaks to who I am."

The result of their efforts is Maiolica, a Dubai-headquartered online

boutique of luxury home decor, which launched last October. The duo curate products from niche Italian, Portuguese and Scandinavian brands, including glassware company Ichendorf Milano, Nordic design specialist Ib Laursen, ceramics creator Casa Cubista, handcrafted Danish designer Anne Black and fabrics and furnishings store Fiorira un Giardino, among others.

Of course, a one-off accessory from a boutique brand is only as special as the way you use it, so we pick Piccolo and Posenato's brain about table settings, multi-use homeware and more. "Setting the table is an everyday act, yet one that imbues the setter and the diners with a sense of togetherness. Getting family and friends reunited around the same table is so much more than just sharing a meal. That sense of intimacy,

togetherness and sympathy that lays around the dinner table or dining room is something we learn since childhood," says Posenato. "The ambience is definitely a crucial element that contributes to amplify these feelings – be that through colours, patterns or contrasts."

Piccolo is a fan of the mix-and-match concept, so you can "give yourself infinite options", she notes. "For example, in an intimate set-up even if it's only two people, red goes very well as an accent colour, even if it's just on small, peripheral accessories. If you're having a casual dinner for friends or family, the sharing concept is ideal – so include decorative serving plates and a big bowl for the salad.

"For parties and special occasions, look to gold underplates, full sets of cutlery and flower vases in the

[Part 2]



Appetiser, soup, main course and dessert plates from Italian brand Bitossi are sold individually on homeware e-store Maiolica to help hosts mix and match

middle,” Piccolo continues. “If it’s a formal or business dinner you’re hosting, why not consider a printed menu, and a special plate for bread and butter?”

Having said that, the Maiolica team are big believers in flexibility when it comes to table-setting etiquette. “We are trying to set a trend where most table-setting standards are rediscussed and put upside down. So we don’t really dictate any dos and don’ts, but let our customers set up a table based on their own and their guests’ tastes and personality,” says Posenato. “There are infinite ways to make a setting unique. For instance, you can assign a predominant colour to each guest and set each seat based on that specific palette.”

Tableware that serves dual purposes is another tick in the duo’s book. From serving soups in espresso cups and plates doubling as wall art, to giving old utensils new life, Posenato and Piccolo regularly post on their website and Instagram ideas on how people can use objects in a different way than originally intended.

“I love to bring up the example of how we fell in love with our Moor’s Heads from Sicilian brand Maremore, which is also one of our bestsellers,” says Posenato. “These statues were originally created as table and shelf vases. At some point, we thought of maximising their decorative beauty and impact by displaying them as candleholders, placeholders and even as a case for kitchen tools ... the more the use, the better.”

Another popular brand on the site is its line of Bitossi Home glassware, Diseguale, which translates as “uneven” from Italian. “The tumblers and goblets are made of borosilicate glass in northern Italy, which has a tradition for handmade glass-making. They take their name from that fact that each glass, even from the same set, is slightly different in colour and shape,” says Posenato. “It says a lot about what we are trying to transfer in terms of values and trends.”



A set of Diseguale glasses Photos Maiolica

Panna Munyal