

The Mindful Minimalists: Anishka Clarke and Niya Bascom

Description



Anishka Clarke and Niya Bascom

Anishka Clarke and Niya Bascom are the duo behind Ishka Designs, the Brooklyn-based interiors firm making waves around the world. With an impressive portfolio spanning New York, France, Jamaica and beyond, they have earned a reputation as pared back minimalists who take inspiration from the shapes, patterns and textures of nature, and a “waste-not”, ecological attitude to materials. In fact, they state three simple words that sum up their design ethos: “Mindful. Minimal. Bespoke.”

Anishka and Niya were both raised in New York to families of Jamaican-Guyanese origin, but each took a completely different route into interior design. Anishka spent 10 years working in finance on Wall Street before hitting reset and retraining as an interior designer in New York. Niya, on the other hand, trained in photography in New York before taking on freelance work as a commercial photographer and film set designer. They first began working together in 2006 almost by chance; a friend of Niya’s asked them both to help with the redesign of a hostel space in Crown Heights. After that, Anishka explains: “the business just evolved organically from there.”



area, a ground up construction vacation rental property on the island of Jamaica. Photo: Niya Bascom

Today the company specialises predominantly in private residential and vacation properties, and their emphasis is on keeping spaces as clean, open and spacious as possible. “It is important for the eye and the brain to rest so that we can process what we are experiencing,” says Anishka, adding, “Empty space or negative space helps that happen.” One of their most celebrated interiors is the ‘White House’ in Jamaica, a rental property designed with simplicity in mind. The space includes clean white walls and accents of texture and colour in naturally derived materials including stone, seagrass and wood. This empty, open space neatly frames the tropical green paradise outside, while also forming a cool and tranquil escape.

Another of Ishka’s much-publicised interiors is what they call the “Parisian Pied-a-Terre”, a 19th century duplex near the Eiffel Tower, which was in need of modernisation to turn it into a rental property. Anishka and Niya responded sensitively and intuitively to the owner’s extensive art and antique collection, displaying treasured possessions in simple wooden cabinets, shelves, and even a wooden grape trough. They brought in new hardwood flooring throughout and also introduced modern touches to inject a contemporary feel into the space, including sleek round lamps, rush-seated chairs and painted pops of colour.

More recently, Ishki Design took part in the ‘Obsidian Virtual Concept House’ project in February this year, an enterprise established by the Black Designers and Artists Guild to celebrate today’s leading Black architects and interior designers. Ishki were one of 23 designers invited to imagine a room for the ‘virtual’ Obsidian House of 2025, a fictional concept home for the future with an emphasis on physical, social and emotional well-being.



5-bedroom East Hampton second home

It is fitting that Anishki and Niya were selected for such a brief, given how closely they intertwine their private life with work. Niya points out “When we

are not designing or obligated to design, it is still difficult to separate design from life. Design is in everything we see, touch, and experience. Because our lives are constantly influenced by good and bad design, it invariably creeps into 99% of our interactions, whether work-related or not."

As one might expect, their own home which they share with young children is a work of interior design art, combining carefully curated artworks with objects collected from extensive travel, flea markets and antique fairs. More surprising, perhaps, is how carefully both designers curate their own personal images, carefully organising minimal capsule wardrobes from ethical, sustainable sources that reflect the same streamlined elegance and ecological awareness of their interiors. Niya observes, "Anishka is a natural and organic woman. Her style is simple but powerful, bold but minimal … which is reflected in her approach to interior design." Anishka adds in support, "Niya is easily one of the most stylish men I know. His physical attire and presence are eclectic and forward-thinking, layered, and complex. His home is highly curated, very eclectic, and reflective of his travels and his obsession with art."

A cynic might wonder if all this synchronicity could become claustrophobic over time, but both Anishka and Niya try to make space for one another within the partnership, taking breaks from one another when they can through travel, museum and gallery visits. And there does seem to be a yin-yang balance of opposites between them that keeps things fresh and alive. "I am an introverted hermit, while Niya is an extroverted nomad," says Anishka, "so there's probably a lot that annoys us about the other, but it's probably also the reason we're still functioning after so many years."

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Date Created
September 5, 2021
Author
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