



VIKTOR THE INCREDIBLE

Leading the charge for a contemporary new landscape in Dubai, Architect VIKTOR UDZENIJA gives us a first look at an icon-filled home that hits the heights of the style Index

*Words by RUE KOTHARI
Photographs by TOM LINDBOE*



Right: On the terrace with Mala, Viktor wears t-shirt and cardigan by artist Richard Woods. Limited edition Marie Coquine chandelier by Baccarat; Teso coffee table by Lord Foster for Molteni with screen printed metal tray by Piero Fornasetti; Allure armchair by Molteni

When I first met Viktor Udzenija in Dubai back in 2012 he'd already made his mark on the city. As the lead design consultant on the Index Tower, Lord Norman Foster's concrete monolith in the Financial District, he was part of the team responsible for a welcome dose of modernism in a landscape thickly populated with quick-build towers and novelty architecture. When the project was complete, he shipped his belongings back to London, ready to resume his old life. But he never quite made it. "I realised that there was opportunity here, that I could actually start my own practice and make it work," he says earnestly. "It was a brave move."

That Viktor is bold is without doubt. To be an accomplished architect with a burgeoning practice and a bank of credible projects in his wake at just 33-years-old requires a rare set of skills. He knows his stuff, he's learned from the best and is adept at diplomacy, a necessary asset for anyone working in the region. "People work with me because they want a contemporary home, one that reflects their wants and needs," he says. When it comes to his own house, it's clear that Viktor's personality is on display. "I wanted a space that was fun, humorous, clean and full of character." And of course, it's fitting that he has come to rest in a sprawling two-bedroom apartment in his Index Tower – one of the most coveted addresses in the city.

"Because of my knowledge of the building, I knew that this apartment had the best layout, with larger bedrooms and a huge terrace with a view out to the sea," he says of the warm, light filled apartment that's home to him and his new puppy Mala. From the bedrooms and living area you can see another architectural icon, The Emirates Towers – we agree it's a landmark absolutely worthy of praise. While many city apartment dwellers permit the view to dominate their interiors, in Viktor's pad, the drama is definitely on the inside.

The large open foyer handpainted by Viktor in monochrome stripe makes an impactful first impression. It's the perfect backdrop for the limited edition chairs by StudioJob, stitched in their signature insect fabric, and of course his prized possession, 'Monumental Wall Lantern' a giant cast bronze light with clanging bells by StudioJob, a piece so heavy that it required considerable engineering to keep it in the wall. "I absolutely love it," Viktor purrs, flinging his arms around the lamp. "When it came up for sale at Sotheby's in New York, I just had to have it."

He's resolutely passionate about all the pieces in his home, from the 'Lou Reed' Philippe Starck leather chair custom made for Le Royal Monceau in Paris to the Arik Levy wall sculptures. "They're my babies," he says, smiling grandly. "I buy things that make me smile, that make me happy. When I come home I'm surrounded by things that I love." It's a great philosophy – no matter the price,



it's money well spent. He loves StudioJob, Established & Sons and the Campana Brothers whose exceptional plates take pride of place on his circular dining table. He's currently passionate about Richard Woods, whose work vaults triumphantly over the boundaries between art, design and architecture; the rug on the living room floor and Viktor's t-shirt and vest both sport Woods' signature style.

In fact, there is nothing extraneous in this apartment – no 'hold' item serving a purpose until the investment piece comes along. In the kitchen, one wall is painted blue, dotted with porcelain pearlescent relief 'wallpaper' by Studio Pirs, that surrounds a large inflatable lobster. "It's the exact lobster that Jeff Koons modelled his sculpture on," says Viktor of the American artist's most famous work. The entire effect is to transform the all-white kitchen into a pop art statement; one added to by a yellow incarnation of the award-winning Plopp stool by Oskar Zieta, purchased from Stilwerk Gallery at Design Days Dubai. Being photographed here, Viktor comes to life. He professes to being shy in front of the camera, but it doesn't show – his easy elegance and megawatt smile getting us the 'money' shot in mere minutes.

Mala, his 7-month old French Bulldog seems to be taking her cue from her owner too; she's the consummate professional, posing diligently for pictures even when not required. "I was always against having a dog in an apartment," Viktor says in a whisper, as Mala snuffles about under the sofa. "But I had gone for shisha one day, and there was a pet shop next door. I just popped in, and there she was, freshly flown in from the Ukraine. I couldn't resist her."

We're interrupted by sushi delivery, the lunch of choice for most in DIFC. Viktor's a regular. He loves to entertain but doesn't have time to cook. With such an intense schedule of work, covering large residential and commercial projects for some of the most high profile, influential families in the region, he has to prioritise. Family is key too, so he's squeezing in a quick skiing trip with the clan from Croatia, to the chic resort of Serfaus in Austria. "What I love about Dubai," he says with characteristic verve, "is that it has such a vibrant, positive energy. We're all happy to work really hard, because you are allowed to play hard too – to take a break and come back with a renewed sense of purpose."



Left: Monumental Wall Lantern by StudioJob. Right: Gerit Rietveld's Utrecht armchairs by StudioJob; Panna Cotta side table by Ron Gilad for Molteni; toys by Bearbrick, Japan; serigraphy 'Linie' by Zdenek Sykora. Walls handpainted.



Masters dining chair by Philippe Starck for Kartell; table by Porada; glasses by Patricia Urquiola for Baccarat; Euro Tropics plates by Campana Brothers for Bernadaud; vase by Rosenthal; light by Herzog&DeMeuron for Artemide; photographs by Richard Allenby-Pratt



Handprinted cabinet by Richard Woods for Established & Sons; porcelain sculpture by Czeck artist Spora; stainless steel inflated metal mirror Rondo by Oskar Zieta for Stilwerk Gallery; wall shelves, Corniches by Bouroullec brothers for Vitra

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The Curiale armchair by Rick Owens made from patinated plywood was a gift from Rick and his wife Michele. The limited edition photograph of Takashi Murakami's 2005 Versailles Exhibition is by Cedric Delsaux

Cowhide carpet by Gio Ponti, Panna Cotta coffee table by Ron Gilad both for Molteni. Porcelain golden cross wallpaper by Studio Pirsc; ceiling light in handblown Murano glass by StudioJob for Venini; 'Diadumenos' photograph by Denisa Hricisova; night table with lamp by Mogg.

