

Larger Than Life

The Portuguese brand Luxxu, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary, has recently designed an extraordinary home in Riyadh, drawing on Najdi architecture and blending it with a grand, opulent modern aesthetic.

Words: Dawn Gay

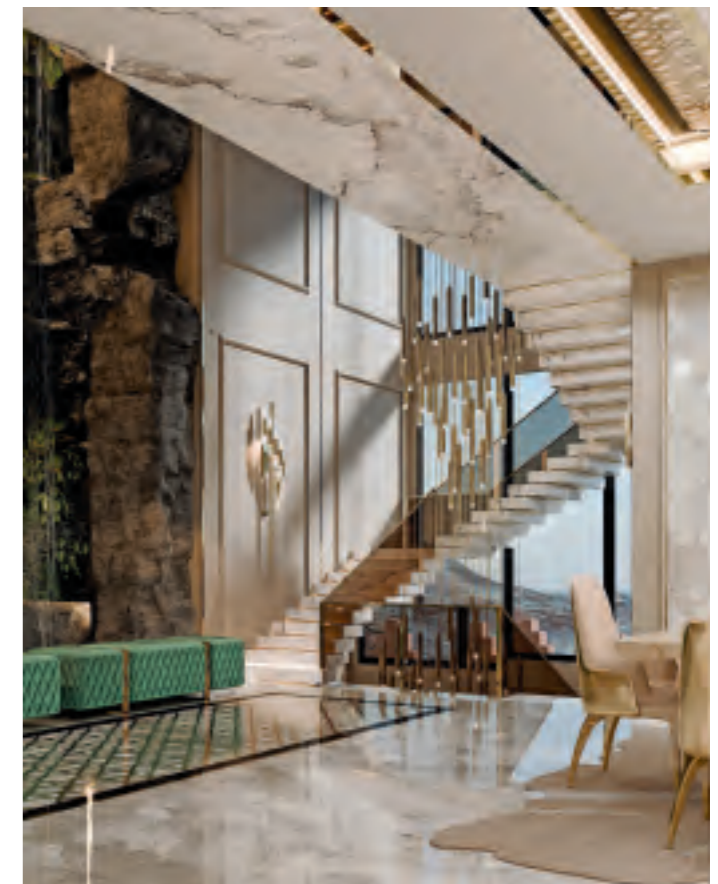
The brand lead and head designer at Luxxu, João Barros, arrives still buzzing from the Portuguese company's 10th-anniversary celebrations. In the mirror behind him, a chandelier glitters like a jewel in the Porto HQ. "It's been a decade of hard work – ups and downs, of course," he says, still smiling. "Last week we spent two days with clients, friends and partners, celebrating ten years of challenges and victories. Now we're all over the world. That was always the goal."

Luxxu's reach is certainly global. Launched as a lighting house, it now designs luxurious, timeless furniture and upholstery too. The brand has furnished high-end homes from mountain retreats to penthouses, bachelor pads and glamorous bachelorette boltholes. Its client list has included Victoria's Secret in Bali, Four Seasons Beverly Hills, Cartier Moscow and several Vacheron-Constantin stores around the world, as well as more recently film and TV sets – Netflix among them.

"Lots of big brands are part of our story," Barros says. "Our pieces keep turning up on screen. The biggest so far was Tom & Jerry: The Movie – we sent more than 100 pieces, so you see Luxxu everywhere. And we have a new Warner Bros. project coming around 2026 – but I can't say any more about it yet."

What he is happiest to talk about is the people around him. "I completely trust the team. We do everything with love, with mastery, and total focus on the client's goal. If they don't like it, we do it again, and again. I've been a teacher, so I know how to speak – but I also know how to listen. It's not 'my team', it's 'our team'."

Teaching is the thread that sparked his never-stop approach. He spent a decade at Escola Profissional de Felgueiras and still sounds like someone who carries a sketchbook to bed. "I need to learn more. I learn every day with clients. I'm always studying. Always learning, learning, learning. At 18, I had to choose: musician or designer. I chose design, went to university, and then started



Left: The villa's entrance features a striking Shard chandelier cascading from above; its sculptural form draws the eye upwards, while deep burgundy Talie upholstery and the statement Littus table ground the foyer. **Above:** The floating staircase has floor-to-ceiling windows on one side and a breathtaking vertical garden installation featuring lush foliage and cascading water on the other.





Above left: Sheathed in gold, the dining room remains tastefully restrained. A Waterfall Rectangular suspension light hangs above the Apotheosis dining table, which is encircled by mesmerising Charla Gold chairs. **Above right:** The outdoor spaces, including the stone-clad pool flanked by Hampton sun loungers, blend traditional Arabian features with contemporary resort-style living. **Right:** Amid a profusion of textures and materials, including Rosso Levanto marble, the Charla bed and bedside tables in the principal bedroom command attention.

teaching. First industrial design for four years, then I did another course and taught shoe design. I just don't want to stop."

The music never left, though. He claims – with a straight face – to play 123 instruments and owns a collection from around the world. Does that musicality show up in his work, like a design leitmotif? "I'm a guy from the art universe," he says, modestly.

He also has a mathematical streak. "Design is maths. It's a science, too. You have to know how to mix materials – marbles, woods, textures – and when to go gloss or matte. Get the numbers right at the start or the whole thing falls apart." As anyone who has mismeasured a bookshelf knows, maths has a cruel sense of humour.

One project that shows off Luxxu's full equation is an exquisite private residence in the heart of Riyadh. The brief came with a bottomless budget and, rarer still, carte blanche. "We could dream," says Barros. "And I loved it."

With long experience in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Dubai, he knew the aesthetic needed to marry local architecture with contemporary luxury. The villa takes cues from Najdi architecture in its strong geometric façade; inside, the balance is more subtle. "We used classic tones – deep reds on pillows and some walls – and then kept the big pieces bright. But to let the space breathe, you bring in beiges, whites, creams and gold." It's a palette that whispers "majestic" rather than shouts "gold rush".

The dining room is the showstopper. Luxxu's Waterfall suspension – still a hit a decade on – drips elegantly over the grand Apotheosis dining table, skirted by Charla Gold dining chairs in velvet and brass. "We needed a huge centrepiece, but one that felt light," Barros explains. "The chandelier is big, yes,

but crystal and glass let light pass through. It floats."

The chairs look as though they've been carved from solid bullion, yet the illusion is achieved in leather – a clever crossover from Barros's shoe-design days. "The Charla dining chair is our bestseller. After 10 years, I wanted a version with more 'luxury twists', using what I know from footwear. You couldn't make that backrest in metal; the shape is too complex. So I called in suppliers from the shoe world – the people who do precious finishes for the likes of Louboutin and Chanel – and asked for a gold leather that reads like metal. We did it, and it works beautifully."

With this much shimmer it would be easy to tip into bling; Barros keeps it on the right side of Bond villain. "There's a lot of gold, but it's grounded by natural tones on the floor, the sideboards, the ceiling – plus loads of natural light. It's balanced. It's calm."

The bedroom introduces a confident splash of Rosso Levanto, a richly veined red marble that Barros says is set to be a major trend in 2025/26. It sounds dramatic on paper; in reality, it's restrained and elegant. "We use neutral pieces so the detail can be luxurious without the room feeling heavy," he says. "Zoom in and you'll see the marble, the crystal, the chandelier; zoom out and the space breathes. We mix classic materials with soft forms – the Charla II nightstand sits perfectly in that environment."

Elsewhere in the residence, an opulent entertainment room features a bespoke poker table – part of a new line at Luxxu. It's a micro-trend born of a macro-shift: people entertaining more at home, and wanting the kind of kit that makes the night feel special. "These clients don't go to casinos," Barros says. "They want▶





Above: Tall stone columns frame soft, flowing white curtains that lead to a shaded outdoor lounge. Here you'll find Luxxu classics including the Hampton armchair, the Mayer centre table and the Magna floor lamps. **Right:** The games room features not only an Algerone snooker table but also an Algerone poker table, the latter illuminated by a Soleil lighting piece by Boca do Lobo. The wood on the table's base matches that of the surrounding Nura chairs.

one at home, just to play and have fun with friends." Consider it the grown-up extension of the home cinema: less Dolby, more double or nothing.

So what's still missing from Luxxu's world? Barros grins. A grand piano in marble, if he has his way. "Let's see if it's possible. I want to join my two worlds – gold, marble, noble materials – and music, in the shape of a piano." If he pulls it off, it will be less instrument, more sculpture you can play.

A decade in, Luxxu's original glow hasn't dimmed; if anything, it's refracted into new territories – hospitality projects, film sets, rooms where people live and laugh and gather. Perhaps that's the secret. For all the talk of marbles and metrics, Barros's design language is ultimately human. He listens, he iterates, he treats a chandelier as lightly as a melody. And while the chandeliers will sparkle, that approach is what really makes the rooms shine. ☺



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**DESIGN IS
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 MARBLES, THE WOODS,
 THE TEXTURES. TO KNOW
 WHETHER TO CHOOSE A
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