

WARM  
OPULENCE

Sweeping  
symmetrical  
staircases are  
accentuated by  
two golden crystal  
chandeliers

HOMES  
Private  
Lives

THE

# Grand Arrival

THIS LUXURIOUSLY APPOINTED ABODE IS HOME TO THE FIRST KUWAITI AMBASSADOR TO SINGAPORE. ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE DISCOVERS A LIVING SPACE THAT SHOWCASES THE BEST OF KUWAIT





**S**TATUESQUE, PRISTINE white columns signal an imposing residence from where the red, white, black and green Kuwaiti flag proudly dances in the morning sun. Two sets of black gates whirl open to reveal dazzling black marble supporting a glittering swimming pool sheltered by palm trees amid a grassy lawn. A majestic stone fountain trickles softly.

This is home to Afrah and Abdul-Aziz Al-Adwani, the first Kuwaiti ambassador to Singapore, and their three children. It took seven months, during which 77 properties were viewed, to find a house that the couple felt comfortable with. She explains, "Because we are the first ambassadors to Singapore, it is a big responsibility for us to find the right home."

Their initial concern upon moving here was whether their daughter, aged four and sons aged seven and 12, would like Singapore. Afrah says with relief, "They love it here!" Her husband Abdul-Aziz adds, "There are no four seasons so we don't have to worry about what they wear." All three children were born in London, where the couple lived for 10 years. "They are practically half British," Afrah smiles.

#### Welcoming Home

The vast double entrance doors reveal immense sweeping symmetrical staircases accentuated by two enormous golden crystal chandeliers. Opulence mixes with vibrant warmth. A glow of soft silk damask drapes in a wash of gold soothes the eye.

A polished wooden box bearing a Kuwaiti emblem contains a very precious Oud perfume, along with its wood that is burned as incense. The custom is to anoint guests on arrival and departure. "The warm smoky scent is of such high quality it can stay on its wearer for a week," says Afrah proudly.

Across the hall is what is termed the "informal" sitting area, where Afrah and her husband entertain close friends. "Kuwaiti houses have to have levels of seating distinguishing informal from formal, apart from when it is an open house event," Afrah explains.

We sit on a burgundy five-seat silk damask sofa with elegantly curving legs while refreshingly cold mint tea is offered in ruby-red glasses, matching the décor. Shades of red and gold reflect polished mahogany. A silver-framed portrait of the family in national dress rests on a side table with silver dishes and a perfectly matching green and purple teapot. Twin mahogany coffee tables in the centre display artefacts: a jade dagger, Chinese drums, golden candles, two peacocks. At the back of the staircase, Afrah has placed an enormous Chinese drum. "I always try to showcase something from

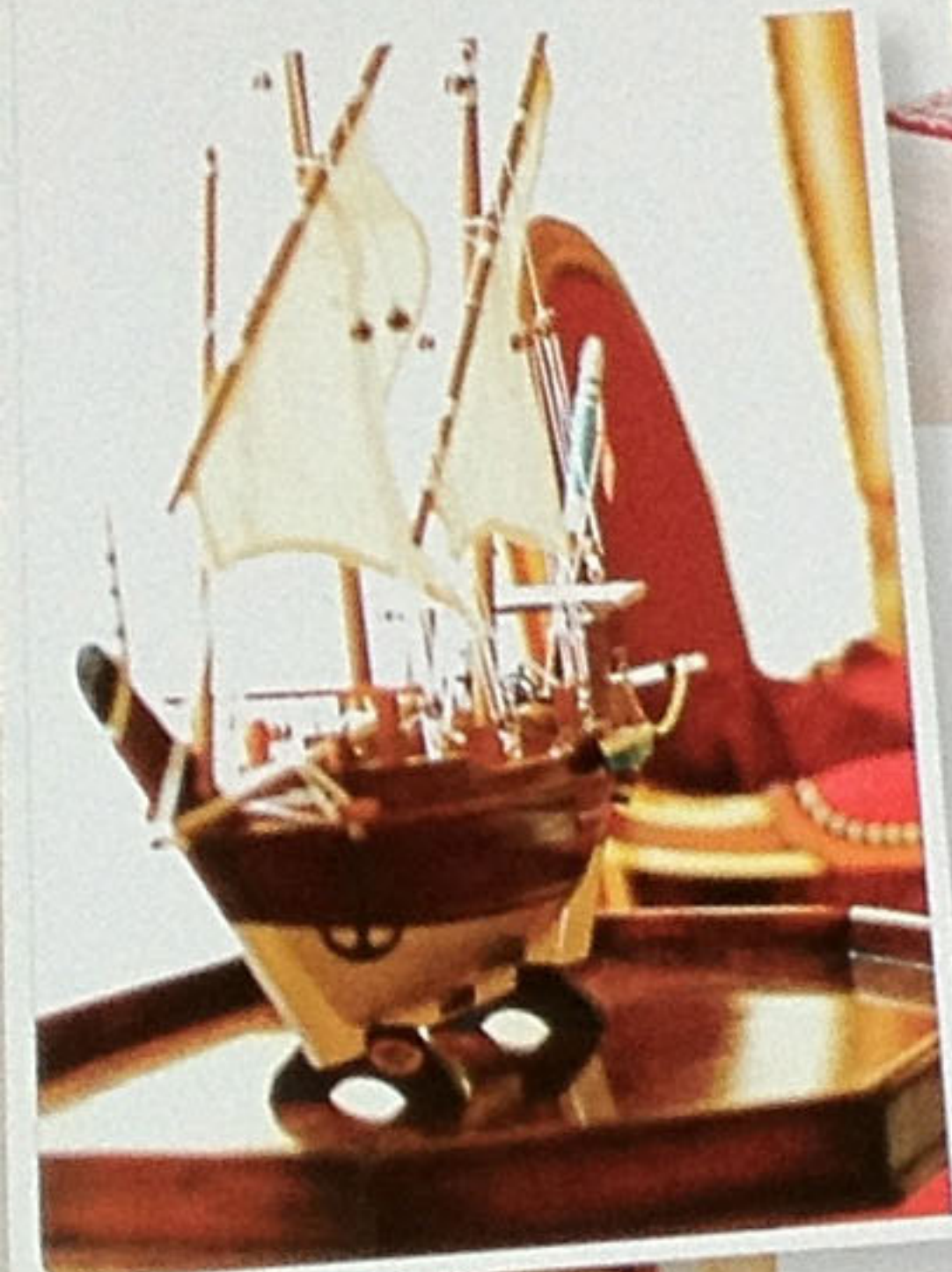


#### LET THE FEAST BEGIN

**FROM TOP** The close-knit family dine together regularly; when entertaining, dinnerware emblazoned with the national emblem are used  
**OPPOSITE PAGE** The stately dining room seats 20 for a formal meal



THE

TRADITION  
PREVAELS

**FROM TOP** The formal living room is where Al-Adwani hosts dignitaries; a Kuwaiti national ship, the Boom; the rare Oud perfume is used to anoint guests when they arrive



the country we live in, in all my homes," she explains, adding that her collection will surely expand.

Interior design is Afrah's hobby even though her father insisted she study business. "I enjoy the whole process of moving, finding a house and changing it. A house reflects moods of the people living there, so is always changing but your personality has to be in that house and I think you have to be relaxed in your home before you show it to others." Practical touches include automatic glass doors bearing the Kuwaiti national emblem, which keep in cool air during large receptions. Ornate mirrors highlight space created by raising the ceiling and demolishing a wall to open out the ground floor.

Most of the furniture is in Italian classic style by Baker, shipped in from Kuwait. Abdul-Aziz says with pride, "My wife is entirely in charge of the interior. We've moved from one city to another and she has been exposed to a lot of design, she has the touch and taste. I don't want to interfere because I may spoil it."

A Boom, or traditional ship, indicates Kuwait's maritime history of trade in spices and pearls. Silver enamelled containers are replicas of some of the prized Al-Sabah collection of Islamic artefacts bearing the name of the royal family. "Everywhere, I am proud to showcase Kuwait. We are not representing ourselves but our government." Formal chairs and sofas are upholstered in yellow, red, gold and pink striped fabric on chairs and sofas;

tall gold goblet glasses act as candle holders.

VIP guests such as the Mayor of Kuwait would be received in the formal sitting area. "Yellow, the more luxurious colour, works well with burgundy. I had to hunt for and mix everything together," explains Afrah. Each shade is delicately matched in curtain tassels, carpet, cushions; even the crystal chandeliers have a touch of pink gold.

## Entertaining Finesse

The ambassador has laid on a veritable feast for us. Entertaining takes place a minimum of twice a month, for 20 if seated or 100 for an open house buffet dinner – and always based on a theme. In the official dining room, burgundy red is the theme. Paintings depicting still life flowers and garden scenes hang above the sideboards.

Today, Afrah and Abdul-Aziz welcome us with the Kuwaiti national dish, Quzi: succulent slow-roasted lamb on a bed of basmati rice cooked in butter with nuts and saffron, the warm inviting scents making one feel at home.

"In Kuwait our main dish is rice with lamb. Normally for a guest we do a whole lamb," Afrah smiles. Sumptuous dish after dish is brought out: saffron chicken briyani, tangy fresh tabbouleh of finely chopped mint and parsley with the smallest diced skinned tomatoes, a hot, dry vegetable salad, sea bass grilled in a tandoor oven, stuffed vine leaves, a platter of strawberry, dragon fruit and pineapple. All are colourful, beautifully presented and exquisitely delicious. "The custom is to take three helpings," Al-Adwani says with a straight face and a twinkle in his



*Ornate mirrors highlight space created by raising the ceiling and demolishing a wall to open out the ground floor*



eye. He waves away our protests, saying, "It's like jogging. It makes your body uncomfortable for a while at first, but once you're used to it, you can do long-distance, no problem!"

## Private Spaces

After lunch, we sip tea served with butterfly-shaped sugar from tiny red glass cups and continue our tour of the mansion. It's clear that the first level has been designed for entertaining, while the personal spaces of the family are tucked away upstairs and down.

In the basement is a den that's been converted into a spacious entertainment room. A large curved sofa gazes at the television screen beneath which is a traditional Kuwaiti coffee pot set and a Kuwaiti ship. Glass display cabinets hold

charming figurines depicting traditional Kuwaiti ways of life. In a corner is an antique chest.

"All houses in Kuwait have one of these," says Afrah. "It is a trousseau filled with special dresses and jewellery. On top is an incense burner and rosewater phial modelled on the Kuwaiti towers."

We return to the living room downstairs where more Kuwaiti desserts await, including Zalabia: deliciously sweet fritters soaked with honey. The sweetness offsets traditional Kuwaiti coffee of a light, clear, orange flavoured with cardamom. Afrah brings the charcoal of the Oud wood burning in a golden bejewelled cup and passes it round. Scented smoke signals the end of a memorable day and insight into part of the inviting world of Kuwait graciously brought to Singapore to thrive in elegance and wonder. **E**

LAP OF  
LUXURY

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Shades of red and gold reflect polished mahogany; on top of a trousseau is an incense burner modelled on the Kuwaiti towers; traditional coffee flasks used in the informal den