



Interior designer Alexia Lundgreen makes beautiful handmade pillows. The one she holds up, she has given the name Kismet, an old word meaning 'destiny'. "I dreamt for years of creating my own textile patterns and products. When I moved to Norway, my dream finally came true," she says.



Left: Alexia Lundgreen's great-grandparents Olympia and Serafin used to have their own textile business. Their story has been a strong inspiration for Alexia's Heritage Collection. Photo: private. **Right:** Alexia Lundgreen personally embroiders every single one of her special edition lumbar pillow cases.

'Making textiles is part of my colourful family history'

She sees beautiful patterns everywhere she turns. Everything can be an inspiration for a new pillow – as long as it connects to her story.

By Frode Sunde Didriksen | Photos: FRODE SUNDE DIDRIKSEN

On a beautiful day in October 2015, Alexia Lundgreen did something she had never done before: she bought a sewing machine. It was the first step in making a 20-year-old dream come true. "It's in my blood to design patterns. Making textiles is part of my colourful family story," says Lundgreen.

From an early age, the Belgian-born interior designer was intrigued by her father's stories about the family – especially about her great-grandmother Olympia. "She grew up in a Greek textile family in old Istanbul around a hundred years ago, when the city was still the heart of the Ottoman Empire. She met my great-grandfather, Serafin, who came from a family of Armenian weavers. They fell in love, married and ran a textile business in the

souks of the old town for many years. It feels as if I inherited their love of textiles," says Lundgreen.

She describes how her great-grandmother used to have her own design book, where she kept all of the patterns she used in the daily running of their business. "My father remembers this book from his childhood. Unfortunately, it was lost sometime in the 1960s, so I have never seen it. But I am making my own book, inspired by Olympia."

Lundgreen, who now lives just outside Norway's capital city Oslo, feels great gratitude towards her parents who have always encouraged her creative projects. "I started making small pieces of furniture to decorate my doll houses when I

was six years old. I discovered my passion!" she explains. "Later it felt only natural to study interior design. I started with two years at the Vogue Academy in Amsterdam and then continued with four years at the Art Institute of California in Los Angeles."

From Sunset Boulevard to the heart of France

After her studies, she founded her own interior design agency in Los Angeles. It was an exciting time under the tall palm trees of Sunset Boulevard and the hot, golden California sun. However, the dream of starting her own textile and interior company was born a few years earlier – during a trip to Indonesia. "When I visited the island of Bali, I found myself 'wrapped' in a rainbow of colours and patterns. There and then I knew that one day I would make my own textiles and patterns. But I immediately had such doubts. I knew virtually nothing about textiles," she recalls.



Left: Alexia Lundgreen is very thorough in her selection of colours. Every single one needs to match the others perfectly. **Right:** With a paintbrush and watercolours, Alexia Lundgreen loves to explore the energy and dynamics of her designs before they are turned into digital patterns. In her office, she surrounds herself with inspiring colours, materials and pictures, which she hangs up on her mood board.

The dream lay dormant for a while, but after eight years on the American west coast Lundgreen packed her suitcases and headed home to Europe. "It was a culture shock to leave the huge metropolis of Los Angeles and find myself in the calm, rural parts of France. It took some tough adjusting, but I learnt a lot about myself and my strength during that time."

She settled in Vichy, a picturesque city in the heart of France. "I loved it there. The town is full of amazing architecture, even if a lot of it is worn down. It must have been spectacular there back in its heyday!" Lundgreen says. "It inspired me to set up my own online interior design business, working with international clients from my big living room. It was a sweet time for me, dividing my time between designing and walking my little Yorkshire terrier around in the beautiful parks."

In late spring 2015, after five years in France, the time had come to embark on new adventures. This time it would take Lundgreen to where she absolutely did not expect – Norway. "One day I walked down the stairs of my apartment building in Vichy and outside my door stood this tall, blue-eyed Norwegian man. We talked our way through a sunny French afternoon, which turned into a late Champagne evening. And, as they say, the rest is history. I guess he fell in love with my dark Mediterranean hair," she

laughs out loud, her warm hazel-coloured eyes sparkling.

A collection that tells a story

So what happened to the sewing machine? Lundgreen explains that after her first Norwegian summer – with the encouragement of her boyfriend – she decided to establish her new company. "I had nurtured the dream of having my own textile business since my trip to Bali, and now the time was right," she smiles.

By the new year she had full command of the sewing machine, and the first rolls of textiles arrived at the doorstep – perfectly coloured and printed in Sweden. "I was so happy I was jumping around... After about a year and a half here, I find a lot of my new inspiration in the beautiful Norwegian and Scandinavian nature, especially the magical light we have here throughout the year – or the lack of light. I dream about seeing the northern lights; I am almost a bit obsessed with it," she laughs.

When introduced to new faces, the English-French-German-Dutch speaking designer is often confronted with how Scandinavian her last name sounds. "I have been told numerous times that I have a typical Swedish name – Lundgreen. Unfortunately, I have no idea where it comes from, or more precisely how it ended up being my family name. Maybe it originates from a Swedish noble man,

soldier or adventurer who decided to explore the world. I really don't know, but I would love to find out more about my Scandinavian heritage," she says.

The young designer is passionate about making unique textile products for her customers, a handmade range that tells the story of who she is and where she comes from. She plays and experiments with different types of materials, always keeping a close eye on the quality of the fabrics.

"My goal is to offer my customers a sense of luxury when they buy an Alexia Lundgreen product – and that they get a story to go with it, something they can tell their family and friends. I hope my creations can make a small contribution to people's memory book, a part of their story," Lundgreen says. "I just love creating textile designs. It is my kismet – my destiny."

QUICK FACTS:

Name: Alexia M. Lundgreen
Profession: Interior & textile designer, manager of her own design agency and webshop
From: Born in Eupen, Belgium, lives in Kolbotn, Norway
Passionate about: Exciting patterns, fresh colours, exotic travels and literature
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