

9
PATMOS, GREECE

A Home at the End of the World

The designer Leda Athanasopoulou grew up with Patmos's religious prophecies in her ear. But it was her singular eye that spotted an abandoned 17th-century house and revealed its future.

By CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN
Photographs by MIGUEL FLORES-VIANNA



In the courtyard of a 17th-century home designed by Leda Athanasopoulou on the Greek island of Patmos, the custom table in reclaimed Dionysos marble is by Thomas Palaos. The neoclassical cement tile flooring was added in the 19th century.

Opposite: An original stone staircase leading from the courtyard to the first floor.



Athanasopoulou, wearing a dress by Daniela Gregis, at the entrance of the house.

The novelist and all-around Greco-ophile Lawrence Durrell once defined Greek islands as “places where different destinies can meet and intersect in the full isolation of time.” That might sound like a lot of literary hot air, until you visit Patmos. Less than 40 miles from the Turkish coast, Patmos is hardly a traveler’s idea of a daytrip (there’s no airport on the island, and a ferry from the mainland takes seven hours). Its most famous resident? St. John, who wrote the Book of Revelation while in exile at the end of the 1st century. And yet this seahorse-shaped Dodecanese conundrum, with its pine forests and ravishing pebble and sand beaches, has also proven a fertile stomping ground for the haute creative classes. Artist Teddy Millington-Drake, interior designer John Stefanidis, auctioneer and dealer Tobias Meyer, and patrons like Aga Khan and Prince Michael of Greece all called this island home.

Now 35-year-old Greek interior designer Leda Athanasopoulou is putting her own aesthetic mark on the island. Although “mark,” suggesting branding or vandalism, might be the wrong word. Athanasopoulou’s humble, subtly seductive design philosophy is informed by the idea of organic stewardship rather than self-imposing domination. “Many of the houses on Patmos were built by local families in the 17th century,” she says. “Maybe they were restored in the 19th century. Now it’s our turn to restore them. But the buildings remain the protagonists. We aren’t going to live forever. We’re simply continuing their history.”

Athanasopoulou grew up in Thessaloniki, spending childhood summers on Patmos in the whitewashed, Jenga-like town of Chora. Her mother, an acclaimed architect, also had a knack for interiors. Leda went away to London and Paris



In the living room, a painting of Chora, the main town on Patmos, by an unknown artist hangs over a traditional Greek sofa. Vintage Thonet chairs; 20th-century Qashqai kilim from Iran; artwork (left) by Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur.

for university, before studying design in Milan and a stint in New York. By her mid-twenties she was back in Greece and tackling her first solo design projects on Patmos. “I did one house and then was asked to do another by the same owners, and then I did a hotel,” she recalls. Athanasopoulou managed to juggle these Patmos projects with her growing design business in Athens. Five years ago she embarked on a Patmos design venture all her own, taking over an abandoned, ramshackle mansion in Chora that she renovated from the ground up. Named Sekiari, the five-bedroom house with a spacious rooftop terrace proved a labor of love.

In 2024 Athanasopoulou added a second property to her portfolio, acquiring an abandoned house on the south side of Chora built in the 17th century. She calls this one Ypanti, after a nearby chapel. The two-story domicile might have appeared at first a more modest renovation, but, as Athanasopoulou discovered, “there were little rooms everywhere but only one bath.” She was able to create three

separate bedrooms with adjoining baths without sacrificing the natural flow of intimate quarters.

Much of the initial work focused on conserving the house’s textures and tones. The original wood plank and cement tile floors were painstakingly refurnished, and Athanasopoulou used reclaimed Patmian terra-cotta tiles (once an island specialty) in the kitchen and bathrooms. She repurposed a slab of marble from Patmos’s stone yard as a kitchen table and the house’s antique shutters as cabinet doors. “I like introducing materials that have a sense of local history,” she says.

“The house doesn’t have a garden, and there are no prominent architectural details, as there are with some of Chora’s grand houses. Instead of that feeling like a disadvantage, it allowed me more of a chance to experiment.” Case in point: The house had been painted turquoise and brown (Patmian homes were often done in paint leftover from use on boats). Athanasopoulou updated those hues, trading brown for oxide to enhance the contrast with the green turquoise. These

colors became the accents for the doors, window frames, and trim, while the glossy white walls allow plenty of Aegean light to bounce through the interior. Pottery and ceramics are sprinkled around the living room. The terraces’ cushions are made from an antique Cretan sack fabric. The glass panes of a closet door in the main bedroom have curtains of vintage YSL fabric found at the Marché aux Puces in Paris.

Now the fun begins. This year Athanasopoulou is opening the doors to the two Patmos homes she owns (along with a third she designed named Stefania) for travelers to rent (and bring home—guests can make special orders of the pieces in each house). She’s calling it “Leda Space,” an experience designed entirely by her, as she says, “from A to zed.”

That phrase echoes the famous description of the divine, “the Alpha and the Omega,” penned on Patmos by St. John 20 centuries ago. Durrell might be right about wildly divergent destinies meeting on one dot of land in the middle of the sea. ■



In the kitchen, vintage Viennese chairs surround a custom dining table with a top in reclaimed Aliveri marble and a base made of antique grinding stones.



A plate rack in a custom shade of green holds vintage tableware from the island of Samos.

Below: The original hearth is now a storage area curtained by a striped Italian linen. The clay pots are from the island of Lesbos.



"I LIKE INTRODUCING MATERIALS THAT HAVE A SENSE OF LOCAL HISTORY."

—LEDA ATHANASOPOULOU

Far left: A 1960s Greek ceramic lamp rests on a windowsill. Plate by Eleni Vernadaki; ceramic carnations by Daphne Leon.

Left: A vintage brass tray sits on an antique trunk purchased in Athens.



A vintage dresser from an Athens flea market anchors a corner of the living room. Artwork (right) by Katerina Mourati.



In a primary bedroom, a 17th-century Flemish tapestry hangs behind a custom bed made from a pair of antique bed frames. Antique crochet coverlet from Greece.



A 1930s woven sofa and Egyptian side table in a primary bathroom. Artworks by George Moschos.



"MANY HOUSES ON PATMOS WERE BUILT IN THE
17TH CENTURY. MAYBE THEY WERE RESTORED IN THE
19TH CENTURY. NOW IT'S OUR TURN TO RESTORE THEM.
BUT THE BUILDINGS REMAIN THE PROTAGONISTS."

—LEDA ATHANASOPOULOU

A view of the Prophet
Elias monastery,
located on the highest
point on Patmos, from
the back terrace.