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# In her shoes

For footwear designer Jennifer Chamandi, home is where the art is – whether that’s stilettos, animal pictures or, ahem, Netflix. Grace Cain steps inside

**T**he giraffe leans forward amiably, wide-eyed and quietly amused as it watches me use the bathroom. It’s not the only animal in this west London apartment – there’s a school of fish in the living area, and a giant turtle in the back room – but it’s the one that really makes shoe designer Jennifer Chamandi smile. “The giraffe is so funny,” she says, delighted that I’ve noticed it (how could I not?). “We thought that painting was the perfect choice for the guest bathroom, because it’s where most visitors will go.”

Chamandi is sitting cross-legged on a roomy oatmeal sofa, dressed in a floaty ivory Ralph & Russo trouser suit. “I like to keep outfits monochrome,” she says. “It simplifies decision-making in the morning.” Everything about Chamandi and her apartment is precise and minimalist, but never in a cold or clinical way. You can’t miss the flashes of creativity – the menagerie of painted animals, the splash of colour in a cushion, the electric-fuchsia heels. “I’ve always had a dilemma, because I love both maths and art,” Chamandi explains. “But shoes are the mathematics of fashion. They are so complex in terms of sizing, fit and comfort.”

Designing shoes was always the dream, but when Chamandi was growing up in Lebanon, her parents encouraged academia. “They said it would be easier to switch from finance to fashion, and they were right. I would do it in that order again if I had to.” She graduated from the London School of Economics and was five days into an internship at Merrill Lynch in Beirut when her banking career hit a snag – war broke out in Lebanon. Unsure how long the conflict would last, Chamandi managed to get a phone interview >



Jennifer wears RALPH & RUSSO jacket £2,200 and jumpsuit £2,500; BOGHOSSIAN Merveilles loicle earrings and Inlay ring, prices on request; JENNIFER CHAMANDI shoes £630

“I find design inspiration in abstract geometry. I love the movement and colours”

for a position in London. “The electricity had gone off, and I was in a friend’s basement with a candle when they called,” she remembers. “I had to travel to the UK for the final stage, but all the airports were closed and they were bombing the roads. I drove to Damascus and flew to Paris from there. I couldn’t let the war put an end to my ambition.”

It didn’t. Chamandi took weekend classes at Central Saint Martins before she finally left banking, and learned Italian in less than four months so she could deliver a persuasive business proposal to a reluctant Milanese manufacturer (it worked). Her signature ‘eye of the needle’ design – a punctured heel threaded with a removable strap – is more complex technically than the average shoe. Indeed, it’s now been awarded a UK patent.

Within a month of launching her business, Chamandi gave birth to twin daughters. That was three years ago. Now, bright pink tricycles and pastel-hued playhouses stand alongside Lorenzo Quinn sculptures and Hermès plates in the apartment Chamandi shares with her husband, Roberto Boghossian (of the jewellery house), their kids, the giraffe in the bathroom and – for today, at least – us, bombarding her with questions...



*Above* The apartment is punctuated with artwork and coffee-table books; *below, from left* Shoes from Jennifer Chamandi’s latest collection; looks from Valentino SS20; Pierpaolo Piccioli



My dream is to meet Pierpaolo Piccioli. He’s a genius!

**How do you get dressed in the morning?**

Everything starts with the shoes; shoes are instant empowerment. Once I know what I’m wearing on my feet, the rest of the outfit comes naturally. Right now my wardrobe is mostly Max Mara and Stella McCartney. I also love the new Celine!

**Who is your style icon?**

Gwyneth Paltrow. I’m obsessed with her in *The Politician* on Netflix.

**Can we assume you’re a fan of Boghossian jewellery?**

Yes! If I could only keep a single piece, it would be my Merveilles Halo hoops (opposite page).



Jennifer wears LOUIS VUITTON cape £11,500 and trousers £1,900; BOGHOSSIAN Merveilles Halo earrings and Kissing ring, prices on request; JENNIFER CHAMANDI shoes £630



**JENNIFER’S WISH LIST**



VALENTINO cape £2,790



BOTTEGA VENETA clutch £1,765

Fine Jewellery and Luxury Accessories, Ground Floor; Womenswear, First Floor; Harrods Shoe Heaven, Fifth Floor; and harrods.com



BOGHOSSIAN Merveilles Halo earrings, price on request



*From top left* A turtle triptych presides over a side table; killer heels upon Killer Heels; Jennifer’s style icon, Gwyneth Paltrow, in *The Politician*; *life’s essentials*: flowers, Chanel and gummy bears

my creativity. I’m currently enjoying *What/If* with Renée Zellweger, and I’m a fan of *Jane the Virgin*.

**How about the cinema?**

I love it, although I rarely have time to go. When my mum visits from Lebanon she always makes sure we go together. And I have to get popcorn!

**What are you reading?**

*Rituals for Every Day* by Nadia Narain and Katia Narain Phillips.

**What is the one luxury you’d never give up?**

A good facial.

**Where do you like to eat out?**

My favourite restaurant is Le Comptoir Robuchon in Mayfair; my husband and I always share something chocolatey for dessert. On Sundays – after a morning at Cloud Twelve family members’ club in Notting Hill – we take the girls for lunch at La Petite Maison.

**What’s your drink of choice?**

A lychee martini at Kyubi, the Japanese restaurant at The Arts Club.

**If we locked you in Harrods for the night, what would you do?**

Try on the entire Valentino collection! My dream is to meet Pierpaolo Piccioli. He’s a genius.

**And the rule you live by?**

**Where do you find design inspiration?**

Abstract geometry. I love the movement and colours.

**How do you choose artwork for your home?**

Actually, it’s usually my husband who does this, but we have the same taste. We love things that are highly worked without being overly bold, like the Chun Kwang Young piece (opposite page, top), which is made entirely from folded paper.

**And the animals?**

They all came from the Trowbridge Gallery on King’s Road. The jacaranda fish triptych (previous spread) is by Liz Clayton, and it reminds me of lace; it feels so feminine.

**What’s your favourite room in this apartment?**

My dressing room, because it’s the place I hide whenever I don’t want to be interrupted – and it’s where my shoes are!

**What’s the most valuable thing you own?**

My passport.

**What sorts of trips do you normally take?**

My husband and I are lucky to travel frequently as part of our work, whether it’s to my factory in Milan or to jewellery shows around the Middle East. Holidays are either with family or on the beach. Every year my father-in-law invites us skiing in Courchevel, and we spend summers at his house in Cap Ferrat.

**What do you do to relax?**

I have weekly acupuncture appointments, and I meditate as much as I can. But I also love sitting in bed with gummy bears and Netflix! I used to feel guilty, but I’ve realised that I learn so much through TV shows and movies. They make me dream and boost



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