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VLife

Multidisciplinary creative
Athena Calderone in the
living area of her Brooklyn
townhouse. *Turn the page
for the full story.*



PHOTOGRAPHER: NICOLE FRANZEN

PROFILE

Athena Calderone

An innate and considered sense of style informs everything this creative does, whether its cooking a meal for her family or decorating her home.

By Verity Magdalino

Photographed by Nicole Franzen

In Greek mythology, Athena is not only the goddess of war and wisdom but also the patron of handicrafts. If there was a 21st-century reincarnation for crafting stunning interiors and culinary delights, Athena Calderone, the eloquently spoken Brooklyn-based designer, chef, author and founder of online lifestyle site EyeSwoon certainly fits the bill.

An interior design graduate of New York's Parsons School of Design, the trained dancer launched EyeSwoon in 2011 with the aim of sharing her favourite recipes and interior styling tips with friends. Since then Calderone has published two books — the first, *Cook Beautiful*, garnered a lauded James Beard award for photography. The most recent, *Live Beautiful*, documents what Calderone describes as “the alchemy of creation” in the homes of designers and creatives, including her own. She also has her own podcast, *More Than One Thing*.

Here, we talk to Athena about her journey from dancer to design diva, and the four-storey, three-bedroom 19th-century Greek Revival townhouse in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, where she lives with her husband, Victor — an international DJ and music producer for the likes of Madonna, Beyoncé and Sting — and their teenage son, Jivan.

I grew up in a small suburban town in Long Island, New York, just 30 minutes from New York City and yet a world away. As a child, I did not have an awareness of art or culture, but I was always creative. I studied dance in college, and in a way I can see the similarities between dance and design. They are both wordless expressions of the self that trigger an emotional response from the viewer, and involve interacting with space and form.

My appreciation for design began as a child growing up in our modest ranch-style home in

THESE PAGES, FROM LEFT in the entrance of Athena Calderone's Brooklyn townhouse, **artwork** by Sam Messenger; **flooring** from reSAWN Timber Co. In the kitchen, **cooker** from Fisher & Paykel; **stools** from Thomas Hayes Studio; vintage **vase** from Holler & Squall. A corner of the living area. *Details, last pages.*



Long Island. My mum would rearrange the furniture on a weekly basis. I'd often walk into a room, only to find the layout flipped. It was exciting to be a bystander of these transformations and experience the ways in which a layout, a colour or a piece of furniture could completely alter a space. I certainly attribute my reverence for beauty to my mother.

Over the past 20 years, I have owned and renovated eight homes. Some may find the thought of ping-ponging around Brooklyn — as we have — to be unsettling. But for our family of three, it just feels natural and exciting. Every home has allowed me to strengthen my architecture and design muscles. I love to reinvent a space. I get silly excited by the all-encompassing research. I find the scavenging and collecting of objects downright thrilling. I fixate on the problem-solving until I find resolution, and I crave the knowledge these renovations offer me. Most of all, I love the journey. It's exhilarating, if you allow yourself to be led.

EyeSwoon was years in the making. I have always been a creative but found myself isolated at home in my mid-twenties after I had a baby; my husband Victor travelled often, and I spent most of my days in my Brooklyn apartment with a newborn. I was bursting with this creative energy and I didn't know where to put it. Most people define themselves and their careers out in the world and outside the home. For me, it was the exact opposite. Once I started channelling my artistic eye into my space, it became this amazing playground — a place to create, to design, to express myself. My home unified my passions for design, cooking, and beautiful things. »



THESE PAGES in the living area, **armchairs** by Theo Ruth; **stool** by Jules Leleu; 1970s **Camaleonda sofa** by Mario Bellini for B&B Italia, enquiries to Space Furniture for reissued edition; **Portal coffee table** from Apparatus; **vintage side table, wall sconces and floor lamp**; **Flora Ottilia chandelier** by Atelier Démiurge; **rug** from Soufiane Zarib.





« **When it comes to interior inspiration, I love all of the rule-breaking going on right now** — the embracing of personality, rather than the following of a formula. I feel that the best design happens when you don't have a plan and allow yourself to let a room unfold. When one seemingly singular choice leads you to the next and suddenly you have this wonderful, cohesive space — it's pure magic.

Ninety per cent of the furniture in my home is vintage and that was certainly intentional. I love a clash of cultures in decor. My townhouse is mostly a mix of Italian and French antiques from the 1940s through to the '70s. But I also sprinkled pieces from the 18th century here and there to drive home a sense of history and a little grit. This, along with a neutral but textural palette — from upholstery to wood tones to plaster walls — finishes the space. I find that you can achieve harmony beautifully using only a series of neutral palettes. The contrast of whites, creams and harsher blacks just engages the eye.

We collaborated with Elizabeth Roberts

Architects and began to dissect our specific desires and needs as a family. My first step, and one I would encourage every homeowner to take, was to create a comprehensive floor-by-floor, room-by-room list of our collective and individual needs. Every minute detail was added to this program — the ideal location for each room and its purpose in the home. Compiling this list was really helpful in understanding how to divvy up the space. Dream big on this initial list; you can always scale back.

The accumulation of each and every piece in my home was a granular alchemical experiment of trusting my eye. 'Don't think, just go' became my mantra. I scoured Chairish, 1stdibs, auction sites, eBay, Instagram and estate sales. I obsessively emailed dealers, while aesthetic wanderlust found me on planes throughout Europe to claim these pieces I did not know I needed so desperately in my life until I saw them. These unique elements — an alabaster light fixture, a Peruvian vessel, a diminutive 1830s wooden Swedish chair — once united, began to speak their silent language.

I love the kitchen. It is the coming-together of my overlapping passions of food and design. With this space, I tried to find the sweet spot where use and efficiency beautifully collide with decor. The long kitchen shelf not only holds all of my plates, platters and glassware; it is also a place for me to express my love of vintage. I mingled in decorative objects like the petit rattan lamp, vintage sculpture, artwork and gilded mirror. You should not rob a functional space of decorative elements. A fear of staining >>

THIS PAGE in the dining area, 1950s dining table; chairs by Niels Otto Møller; sideboard by Jacques Adnet; 1960 pendant light by Poul Henningsen; artwork by Ethan Cook.
OPPOSITE PAGE in another view of the kitchen, calacatta paonazzo marble benchtop; taps from Waterworks; 1950s Italian sconces; custom plaster wall finish from Kamp Studios; artworks by artists unknown.





« would never keep me from using beautiful marble. I love the 'life' of a kitchen, ring marks and all!
A home holds emotion. I am fascinated by the way memories are imbued in the things you collect. Every piece in a room, even the room itself, has a story, and people feel that as soon as they step into the space. Design is an emotional thing. You enter a room and maybe you can't quite put your finger on why, but suddenly you feel calm, or relaxed, or intrigued, or even inspired.

My home is my place of inspiration. It is where I work and conceive ideas but it is also where I find calm and decompress. Most of all it is where I build memories with my family.

The pandemic has inspired me to teach and share more through my social channels, particularly IGTV. People want and need to love their homes more, and I want to help them do so. I want to encourage people to look at their homes through a new lens. Revamp, restyle and 're-appreciate' what they already have.



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Not seeing my mum and dad [during lockdown] has really been hard for me. And I really miss restaurants. Also, my husband is a DJ, so he is obviously not working, and while I love spending more time with him now that he's not on the road, the financial repercussions have been challenging. But honestly, I have loved this focused and precious time spent with my husband, son, and our new puppy, Tuco. We have never been together more, laughing more, cooking more, and in nature more. **VL** eye-swoon.com

Watch Athena Calderone host a virtual culinary experience as part of Vogue Living's 3 Days of Design on our YouTube channel; youtube.com/voguelivingmagazine



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP on the terrace, **sofa** from RH; vintage French **chairs**. In the main bedroom, **bed** from RH; 1950s French **bench**; **chandelier** by Angelo Lelli; **artwork** by Struan Teague. In the office, **table** by Angelo Mangiarotti; Faina Toptun **armchair** from Perspective; vintage **floor lamp**. *Details, last pages.*

