



# XVA Gallery, Art Hotel & Café

After a stint in Dubai International Financial Centre, Mona Hauser is back at XVA in Dubai's Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood (formerly Bastikiya), which she opened more than 10 years ago

Words by Gareth Rees / Images by REM

**I**n 1992, art major Mona Hauser, originally from northeast Arkansas, had never heard of Dubai. She lived in America with her husband and infant daughter; the family divided their time between New York and Florida, where she was considering

opening a gallery. But in 1993 HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum invited Hauser's husband (now ex-husband), Dr Michael Hauser, to Dubai to help set up his Godolphin Racing stable. Like so many Dubai expats, Hauser and her husband planned to stay for three years.

Today, 21 years later, it's a bright winter morning in Dubai, and Hauser, now director of XVA Gallery, Art Hotel & Cafe, is still in the UAE, sitting behind her desk in her small, cosy office, just off XVA's main courtyard.

"My first morning in Dubai, I said, 'Take me to the oldest area of

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE



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the city,' which was Bastikiya," she says, her voice just loud enough to be heard over the uplifting classical music emanating from the courtyard café, where several guests are enjoying their breakfast in the sunshine. "Even though there were goats walking around and it was rubble in parts, I said, 'This is where I want to have my gallery, I want to

take one of these houses and turn it into a gallery.'"

Six years later, in 1999, HH Sheikh Mohammed gave Hauser special permission to do just that, and she returned to Bastikiya in search of the perfect house to transform into her gallery. The house she chose, originally built by the Siddiqui family, was in such a state

of disrepair that it took the Dubai Architectural Heritage Department four years to painstakingly restore it and the houses surrounding it. Hauser received the key in May 2003; the hotel rooms opened in September and the first exhibition was in October.

"I was really a one person show [at the start]," she explains. "I was