

Post Magazine/ Design & Interiors

How Hong Kong walk-up flat became a hi-tech rooftop retreat

Pop-up furniture, secret storage and technology transform a Hollywood Road walk-up into a sleek, eco-friendly nest, writes Christopher DeWolf



Photography: Photographolic Studio



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Five floors above a traffic-choked stretch of Hollywood Road seems an unlikely place to find a hi-tech, eco-friendly flat. But sure enough, here on the top floor of a grimy tong lau walk-up, local studio Liquid Interiors has created a slick new space for a no-fuss, healthy lifestyle.

“The client really wanted something techie, sustainable and healthy,” says Rowena Gonzales, founder of Liquid Interiors. Making the task harder, the flat measures just 400 square feet, with a single large room facing Hollywood Road and a narrow corridor leading to a bathroom at the back.

Life in the raw: updating a tong lau apartment

“It’s like, how can we take this really small flat and make it what he wants? We ended up looking at it in terms of transformability,” says Gonzales.

That approach is most obvious in the kitchen, a sleek, minimalist space dominated by metallic walls and an island with a four-burner gas range, an extendable counter and a pop-up extractor fan. The walls fold away to reveal shelves, counter space and an oven.

Seaside tong lau in Kennedy Town gets new lease of life

Instead of a wall between the kitchen and bedroom, Gonzales designed a floor-to-ceiling storage unit, with cupboard doors into the bedroom and a blackboard for chalk messages in the kitchen.

“A lot of our designs encourage innovation,” she says. “We want our clients to have their own creative space.”

The bed is mounted on a hydraulic platform with storage space underneath. Keeping clutter to a minimum, there’s more storage in a wall-mounted cabinet facing the bed and even a cupboard with a charging station for mobile devices, to keep power cables out of sight.

“It was about using every inch we could find for storage. The client still hasn’t filled it up,” Gonzales says. Extra storage may be a common request for Hong Kong renovations, but Gonzales’ client also threw her a curveball: as a commercial airline pilot, he often works odd hours, so he wanted a space where he could sleep comfortably at any time of the day. Gonzales doubleglazed the windows, blocking out virtually all the noise from Hollywood Road, and installed electric blackout blinds that can plunge the entire apartment into darkness even at noon. She also fitted out the flat with circadian lighting, similar to that on a Boeing Dreamliner, that mimics the natural dawn-to-dusk changes of light. In the morning, LED lights embedded in a recessed ceiling turn a shockingly bright white. “It’s better than an alarm clock – it really gets you going,” Gonzales says. Later in the day, they dim and change hue, sliding into cosy mood lighting in the evening and finally a dim red glow at bedtime. The red lights are activated by sensor, so there’s no stumbling to the bathroom in the middle of the night. The entire system can be controlled remotely by tablet.

Air quality was also important. Gonzales is a stickler for using non-toxic building materials and particularly avoids formaldehyde, which can be found in manufactured wood products, carpet, paints and varnishes.

To minimise indoor pollution, two built-in air purifiers were installed, one to filter fresh air from outside and another to filter air within the flat.

All this tech uses electricity, of course, so to keep the energy bills down, Gonzales chose Grade I appliances and LED lights, and she installed a bladeless ceiling fan in the bedroom to reduce air conditioner use. There’s also a solar-powered water heater and a real-time app that monitors the flat’s electricity consumption.

The apartment's final healthy touch is a way to escape it. The flat's main living area is outdoors, on a rooftop with teak screens, a daybed, a wall covered in greenery and a barbecue. Gonzales wanted this space to be transformable, too, so she designed two pop-up lounge chairs that fold into the teak deck (see [Tried + tested](#)). There's even a pull-down screen for projecting movies. "It's really a sanctuary," Gonzales says.

Hollywood Road couldn't feel farther away.



Rooftop The teak-framed bed is designed both for sunbathing and shade, with a retractable cloth awning (HK\$24,000; Mark III Design and Contracting, Patrick Wong, tel: 9199 5331). Mark III also custom built the teak deck, screen and arch (HK\$14,400). Gonzales found the two rusted metal safes in the apartment before renovation and decided to keep them as decorative side tables. Potted plants add a green element to the rooftop, and copper planters (Mark III Design and Contracting, HK\$9,700 for five) maintain the sleek atmosphere. The concrete table (HK\$18,600) is designed for partying, with a builtin ice tray in the centre, and the cupboard (HK\$96,000) serves as an outdoor kitchen; both were custom made by Mark III. The umbrella (HK\$36,200) came from Sankon (1/F, Lockhart Centre, 301 Lockhart Road, tel: 2543 3880).



Kitchen Built by Patata Kitchen (24 Canal Road West, Causeway Bay, tel: 2892 2231), the kitchen island (HK\$116,000, including gas range) serves as a dining table and stovetop. The client wanted an industrial-style look, so Gonzales opted for a dark, metallic finish with punchy elements, such as electric-blue Tolix stools from Taiwan (about HK\$2,500 each) and the Wireflow pendant lam (HK\$28,400) from Zodiac (Tak On Mansion, 32 Morrison Hill Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2832 9987). Instead of an overhead cooker hood, there's a pop-up Roblin extractor fan (HK\$5,499; Invision Worldwide, 26/F, TML Tower, 3 Hoi Shing Road, Tsuen Wan, tel: 3482 2116). Mark III custom built the cabinets, including a unit dividing the kitchen and bedroom, which was covered with a chalkboard on the kitchen side (HK\$53,000).





Home cinema The teak archway is not purely decorative: it contains a pull-down screen for watching movies. There's a power point and HDMI jack hidden beneath the bed for the projector.



Bathroom The mirrors (HK\$4,800 for two), vanity (HK\$7,200) and bevelled-glass door (HK\$12,600) were made by Mark III while Zodiac provided the exposed filament-style LED pendant light (HK\$240). The Kohler mixer (HK\$18,000) was sourced from Arnhold & Co (Lucky Plaza, 315 Lockhart Road, tel: 2865 0123). The wall-mounted angular Toto Jewelhex toilet (HK\$9,200) came from VSC Building Products Company (East Town Building, 41 Lockhart Road, tel: 2186 8280).

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Sleek teak The rooftop is used both for relaxation and entertaining, so Rowena Gonzales, of Liquid Interiors (4/F, Innocentre, 72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong, tel: 3526 0901) wanted it to be as flexible as possible. To save space, she designed a pair of pop-up teak lounge chairs built into the deck. They were custom made by Mark III Design and Contracting, along with the bed, screens and arch, for HK\$14,400.

