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Industrial style meant hard work for Hong Kong flat owner

Perfecting the industrial look is harder than it appears, a Sheung Wan homeowner discovers



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Describing an interior as "industrial" can conjure up images of a cold, unwelcoming space hastily effected and stripped of style.

The opposite is true, however, of Jonathan Barkey's Sheung Wan flat. His open-plan, one-bedroom unit mixes hard with soft, and minimalist with lavish to create a chic bachelor pad with the odd touch of geekiness and loads of character. But achieving this look required a willingness to experiment and dogged determination to get it right.

Working with Rowena Gonzales, of Liquid Interiors, Barkey, a lawyer from Michigan, in the United States, sought to create a 1,060 sq ft loft-like flat from two odd-shaped units in a commercial building. "I thought it would be cool if it looked concrete-ish," he says, adding, "It's actually really tough to get that look."

Barkey learned his contractors would have to work with several materials, not just concrete, to achieve the right feel. So cement board was used in the bedroom; plaster in the living areas and a mineral-and-marble composite called imi-beton (beton is French for concrete and "imi" is shorthand for imitation) for the kitchen cabinet and dishwasher fronts.

"It's meant to look like a cement board but this stuff is a lot more expensive," he says, explaining that the material is both lightweight and durable. "You won't get cracks with this," says Gonzales, seated at the counter of the long island that anchors the open kitchen.

At one end of the apartment is the television and open area (used for exercise); at the other is a work space and en-suite bedroom; running along the length of the flat is a narrow balcony with bi-fold doors.

"There's not much space outside but the full-height glass doors visually expand the area indoors," says Gonzales. Just inside the flat, between the island and balcony, a yellow TRX exercise strap dangles from the ceiling (see [Tried + tested](#)), underscoring that this is a practical home not shy of exposing itself.

However, the designer and client have carefully controlled what is visible. This being a commercial building, it had a sprinkler system for fire safety reasons, which had to be accommodated. Unhappy with the higgledy-piggledy configuration revealed when the suspended ceiling was removed, the sprinklers were re-routed so they were, as Gonzales says, "neat".

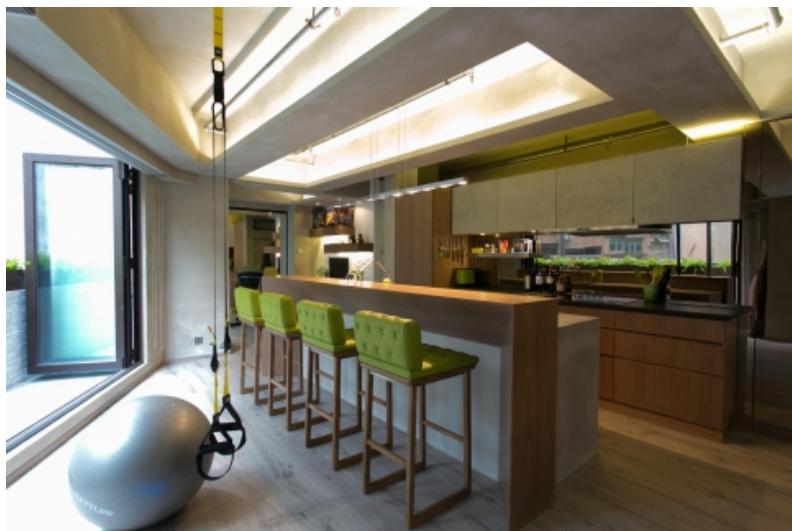
The pair also worked to create beauty from upcycled materials in the sitting area. Originally, they planned to use shipping-container doors for cabinets, but they would have had to be craned up to the flat because of their size, so Barkey instead opted for wood salvaged from boats. Finding the best wood for the job, however, proved labour-intensive: they had to inspect every single weathered piece of timber because each plank is unique. "We then laid them out how we wanted them to look," says Gonzales, who juxtaposed earthy hues to create a perfectly imperfect palette.

They also used concrete-look boxes, made of plywood with a plastic finish, to conceal speakers attached to the ceiling. "They're nothing too fancy," says Barkey, whose knowledge of building work was picked up at an early age: "My grandfather was in the construction business and I've worked on a few sites."

Barkey was also behind the pops of colour throughout the flat. "Green is definitely my favourite colour but it snowballed a bit," he says. "After you buy a few green things you realise a lot of things come in that colour and it turns into a motif."

His love of green extended to an experiment with moss that, unfortunately, proved unsuccessful. "It did not survive," laughs Barkey, explaining that the patch of moss he planted beneath his bathroom sink died a slow death - twice (he refused to concede defeat the first time).

"With air-conditioning it dries out really quickly," he says, "but if you put too much water on it, it starts to grow mould." As with the rest of his flat, he acknowledges: "There's a fine balance to getting it right."



Kitchen The cabinet doors are made of imi-beton (HK\$7,963 a square metre), sourced through Play (41 Gough Street, Central, tel: 3427 8488). The island (HK\$38,500) was designed by Liquid Interiors and Barkey, who sourced the Anta light (€1,190/HK\$11,200) from Ambiente Direct (www.ambientedirect.com), in Germany. The bar chairs, designed by Liquid Interiors (4/F, InnoCentre, 72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong, tel: 3526 0901), cost HK\$1,400 each, not including the leather (HK\$6,450), from Thicas Interiors (4A Wah Ha Factory Building, 8 Shipyard Lane, Quarry Bay, tel: 3480 4544). The wooden flooring (about HK\$77 per square foot) came from Joyful Sky (3/F, CRE Building, 303 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2152 0701).



Living area A movie projector is used to cast a fireplace on the wall. Behind the salvaged boat-wood doors is lots of storage space for Barkey's sports gear and cameras. The wood (about HK\$120 a square metre) came from Chun Kin Material (276 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 3102 9138). On the built-in entertainment unit (which, including the desk and shelves in the work area, cost HK\$6,600), designed by Liquid Interiors, are helmets worn by characters from Star Wars (Boba Fett, far left, and Clone Trooper, far right) and G.I. Joe (Cobra Commander). The blue artwork, inspired by the GI Joe comic, was made to order in Dafen artists village, Shenzhen, as was the red painting on the other side of the "fireplace". The sofa was bought several years ago at Old Shanghai (15/F, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 3527 3135) and the rug came from Tequila Kola (various locations; www.tequilakola.com).



Entrance The entrance, which leads into the kitchen area, has high windows opening into a ventilation shaft. To the right of the large shoe cabinet is a second door to the bedroom (not shown). The coat hooks were sourced through Taobao (www.taobao.com).



Bathroom Under the basin in the en-suite bathroom is a stunning, albeit doomed, moss feature, which came from Brighton Floriculture (56 Flower Market Road, Prince Edward, tel: 2397 3851). With Barkey, Liquid Interiors designed and had its contractor build the mirror cabinet (HK\$5,500) and basin cabinet (HK\$10,175, including the Corian basin). The splashback Laminam tiles (about HK\$1,300 per three metre-by-one metre tile) came from Wing Ming Marble (160 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2598 8430).



Work space Between the bedroom and the open kitchen is a work area. The cement plant pot (US\$59.97), designed by Paola Navone, came from Crate & Barrel (www.crateandbarrel.com) in the US.



Bedroom Behind the floating bed (HK\$7,000), designed by Liquid Interiors, is a cement-board wall with studs that cost HK\$5,150 to build. In front of the bed are sliding panels (not seen) that hide a television. The en-suite bathroom is entered through one of the mirrored doors.

TRIED + TESTED

How to fit an exercise strap to your ceiling

Exercise straps such as the TRX Trainer can be attached to any number of secure items, including trees, poles, and doors. Jonathan Barkey used an anchoring system called the X-Mount, which can be fastened to a stud in the ceiling, affording a complete range of motion. The recommended workout space is about eight feet long and six feet wide, with the anchor point seven to nine feet from the ground. The TRX Home bundle costs US\$199.95 from www.trxtraining.com.

