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Wan Chai flat offers a magic carpet ride to Morocco and India



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Persistence pays off. Proof of that lies in the 2,500 sq ft Wan Chai home of Robyn Ballardie and her husband, who waited five years to purchase a flat adjoining the one they had bought in 2008. Their plan was to pounce when a neighbouring apartment went on the market, then turn the two properties into one spacious, long-term base for their family of four.

"I'd been on and off writing to the person next door, and making inquiries about the flat above us as well," says Ballardie, a lawyer married to fellow Australian Maurice, an engineer. "In the end, I think the lady next door was just sick of me and said, 'OK, we'll sell to you.'"

Finally able to knock two flats together, as friends had done on the top floor of their building, Ballardie started trawling shelter magazines for inspiration, eventually handing a fat sheath of clippings to a design duo who would help realise her vision.

"Blue is her favourite colour," says interior designer Rosie Blay, who - with Liquid Interiors founder Rowena Gonzales - created a nest that whisks you on a magic carpet ride to Morocco and India, with layovers in Australia and China.

The exotic journey begins at the front door, painted in peacock blue.

"It's striking," says Blay, who admits to having a similar personal style to her client, "but we toned it down in the rest of the flat."

That is evident in the living area, where the dominant feature is a large television cabinet-cum-room divider. The marble-clad partition does extra duty by accommodating a flueless fireplace in its open base.

"As you walk through the door, [it] stops you from seeing right into the lounge area," says Blay.

Ballardie adds, "We thought it made sense to have a gap [at the bottom] because otherwise it would look like a big block; it's nice to have that openness."

Their "old flat" became the children's bedrooms and a spacious dining/kitchen space. On the other side of the lounge are the master en-suite, a study that doubles as a guest room, the second bathroom and the helper's area.

Both children had a say about their turf. While the Ballardies' 12-year-old daughter wanted a peace sign in her hippie-chic lair, their six-year-old son chose to sleep with Iron Man: graffiti artists painted the superhero onto a wall beside his bunk bed.

However, the most striking - and expensive - must-haves were chosen by Ballardie.

"[Fired Earth's Marrakech hand-painted terracotta tiles] were my biggest splurge and I blew the budget," she says. "But I wasn't going to be happy with anything else."

The tiles, which look as though they've been dug out of an ancient Moroccan riad, were used for the kitchen splashback and feature extensively in both bathrooms.

To enhance the look, rough-hewn wood veneer was used to clad the beams and columns throughout the flat (see [Tried + tested](#)) and shapely, romantic lamps installed to illuminate the rusticity. Rugs with geometric patterns and Indian block prints pull the look together.

"When I was young, my mum gave me a very small budget to decorate my university flat and I spent it all on one Turkish rug," says Ballardie, explaining how far back her obsession stretches. "I have a huge collection of textiles and tribal rugs, bought over the past 20 years."

Although style was an important feature of the renovation, the priority was to create space for family hangouts.

"We made the bedrooms small and the living areas large because we spend most of our time in the lounge and kitchen," says Ballardie.

These areas are perfect for entertaining. Which brings the conversation to the friends on the top floor: what did they think of the home inspired by theirs? Ballardie laughs: "They walked in and said, 'It doesn't look like Hong Kong.'"



Dining area A large green chest, bought years ago in Macau, holds Robyn Ballardie's rugs. The benches (HK\$7,950 each) came from Tree (various locations; www.tree.com.hk) and the Eames chairs (HK\$4,756 each) were from Aluminium (various locations; www.aluminium-furniture.com). The trio of oversized glass pendants (US\$399 each) came from Pottery Barn (www.potterybarn.com), in the United States. The dining table and shelving unit were from the Ballardies' previous home. The jars came mostly from China, Morocco and Spain. The photograph is by Korean photographer Ahn Jun (ahnjun.com).



Kitchen Patata Kitchen (24 Canal Road West, Wan Chai, tel: 2892 2231) built the cabinetry and island for a total of HK\$486,000. The island base is clad with salvaged boat wood sourced by the contractor, Mark III Design and Contracting (Patrick Wong: 9199 5331). The stools (US\$159 each) were from Restoration Hardware (www.restorationhardware.com), in the US. The bowl came from Morocco.



Lounge The peacock blue front door is slightly visible through the room divider (HK\$150,000), which was designed by Liquid Interiors (4/F, InnoCentre, 72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong, tel: 3526 0901) and built by the contractor, who also made the bookcase (HK\$17,500). Two flueless fireplaces (HK\$21,800 each) from Design Link (1/F, Ruttonjee Centre, 11 Duddell Street, Central, tel: 2868 0991) were installed in the niche. The Era sofa (HK\$144,000) came from Colourliving (333 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2510 2666). The replica coconut chairs (HK\$6,900 each) were from JM Style (www.jmstyle.com.hk). The white oak flooring (HK\$188 per square foot) came from Quick Step (various locations; www.quick-step.com.hk) and the fan (HK\$3,480) from sofasale.com.hk. The Moroccan rug is part of Ballardie's collection and the coffee table was bought almost 20 years ago. Also old are the floor lamp and floor cushions.



Master bedroom An old room divider was painted white and used as the headboard. The pendant lights (US\$14.9 each) came from Pottery Barn. The bedside tables (HK\$10,000 each) were designed by Liquid Interiors and built by Mark III Design and Contracting. Everything else came from the Ballardies' previous home, including the metal cabinet and the Anokhi bedding (www.anokhi.com), from India. The paintings are by a Moroccan artist.



Master en-suite The Marrakech handmade tiles (£17.50/HK\$205 each) were from Fired Earth (24/F, Dominion Centre, 43 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, tel: 2861 3864). Liquid Interiors designed the mirrors (HK\$5,500 each). Below are Victoria + Albert basins (HK\$10,100 each) from Colourliving. The Victoria + Albert bath (HK\$56,650) and Dornbracht bath tap (HK\$52,500) also came from Colourliving. The lanterns (HK\$1,000 each) were from Indigo Living (various locations; www.indigo-living.com) and the laundry basket (HK\$600) was sourced online.



Son's room Six-year-old Peter shares a room with his favourite superhero, Iron Man. The Iron Man graffiti (HK\$8,350) was created by Graffiti4hire (www.graffiti4hire.com.hk), a team of local professional graffiti artists, and the Iron Man wall light (HK\$299) came from Toysbuddyhk.com (18/F, Tung Chun Commercial Centre, 438 Shanghai Street, Mong Kok, tel: 2234 5612). The bunk bed was repainted for his new room. The red duffel bag came from Ikea (various locations; www.ikea.com.hk); the rug is part of Ballardie's collection and the ceiling light (US\$199) was from Restoration Hardware (www.rhbabyandchild.com).



Study Casalis bean bags (HK\$8,100 each) from Okooko (26/F, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 2870 1132) sit in front of a custom-made painting from Shenzhen that hides a Murphy bed. The pouffe (US\$85) came from Moroccan Pouffe (www.moroccan-pouffe.com), in Marrakech. The desk and cabinetry (HK\$17,200) were designed by Liquid Interiors and made by Mark III Design and Contracting. The Aeron chairs (HK\$9,053 each) were from Posh (various locations; www.posh.com.hk).

Tried & tested

Instead of trying to hide the many beams throughout the flat, Liquid Interiors suggested making them a feature. They clad the structural supports with wood veneer, which added to the apartment's rustic look. The veneer (HK\$165 per square foot) came from Thicas Interiors www.thicasinteriors.com in Singapore.

