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Natural, sustainable materials and a muted palette turn Hong Kong apartment into a calm, uncluttered sanctuary

A family of four's 1,520 sq ft flat on Old Peak Road was transformed using biophilic design principles that connect people with nature within built environments

Clever storage solutions cater to all family members, including a concealed bar fridge near the entrance and a recessed kitchen tray that holds a rice cooker



Kee Foong

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A 10-month renovation turned this 1,520 sq ft flat into a calm, uncluttered sanctuary of earthy materials, neutral colours, tactile surfaces and free-flowing spaces. Photo: Simon J Nicol

Never underestimate the power of a search engine. For Kristina Kang, it was life-changing. In late 2019 she and her husband bought a flat on Old Peak Road that needed overhauling, but they didn't know where to start. "I just went online and googled: 'sustainable, eco-friendly interior design, Hong Kong' and Liquid Interiors came up," she says.

Drawn to what she saw on the firm's website, Kang, who works in the sustainability sector, contacted Rowena Gonzales, Liquid Interiors' principal and founder. She was impressed with Gonzales' holistic approach to design, and the way wellness and environmental concerns were fundamental to the practice.

Kang wanted a peaceful, practical, family-friendly residence, but found it difficult to articulate how it should look.

"It's our first home renovation and I knew we needed a designer, but I had no clue what I wanted in terms of design," she admits. An essential requirement was the ability to work from home, and keep an eye on her two young children at the same time.

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Once briefed, Gonzales proposed the concept of “terra”, based on biophilic design principles that connect people with nature within built environments. Her colleague, Polina Volkonskaya, a WELL AP (accredited professional) trained in human health in buildings, executed the project, using eco and natural materials such as FSC timber and plywood, low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint and circadian and low-energy lighting throughout the 1,520 sq ft (141 sq m), three-bedroom flat.

The result of the 10-month renovation is a calm, uncluttered sanctuary of earthy materials, neutral colours, tactile surfaces, quiet corners, sheer curtains, potted plants and free-flowing spaces that take advantage of natural light and the open, green views. An arched entrance provides an early clue that soft lines and rounded corners prevail, as much to avoid sharp edges that might pose a danger to the children as to convey a gentle, welcoming home.

Kang also loves the clever storage solutions that cater to all family members. A large built-in cupboard near the entrance fits golf clubs, tennis rackets, a pram and more. The family’s many pairs of shoes are hidden in a free-standing rattan cabinet, linen is kept in a discreet cupboard, and Kang’s husband has a concealed bar fridge, near the entrance. She waxes lyrical about a recessed kitchen tray that holds a rice cooker, and shows how it slides out when in use to avoid condensation collecting on surfaces.

In the children’s bedroom, which they share, leaving a spare, for guests, wardrobes have been customised to fit small clothing, and woven baskets at the base are handy for storing toys and games. Outside the bedroom, a whiteboard is used to share schedules and reminders, and to show the children’s drawings and other artwork.



I’m now more productive and less tempted to be distracted, and I sleep better

Kristina Kang

Television has been banished entirely, and a projector is used for occasional screen time. Instead, Kang wanted the living room to be conducive to conversation, with a decorative fireplace for the family to gather around. With the exception of a clock above the mantel, the plaster walls have been kept mostly bare.

“People are afraid to have blank walls, but because we have this beautiful textured plaster, it’s not blank, it has a lot of depth,” says Gonzales.

The office, off the living room, is Kang’s favourite space, conceived pre-pandemic but perfect for the times. It has sliding glass doors that provide acoustic privacy when she needs to take a call or concentrate while allowing her to watch the children.

Kang also loves the main bedroom, with its deep, cocoon-like bay window. It’s a feature that doubles as a daybed, where she can sit and read, meditate, take in the views, or settle in for a movie, cold beer in hand.

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Asked if the design has improved her sense of well-being, Kang gives a resounding “yes!”

“I’m now more productive and less tempted to be distracted, and I sleep better,” she says.

And when she returns home after a day or night out, “I tell myself, ‘I’m home,’ and it makes me happy.”



Photo: Simon J Nicol

Living area

The decorative stone fireplace surround was designed by Polina Volkonskaya and made by Liquid Interiors (liquid-interiors.com). Candles are often placed in the hearth, and stockings were hung from the mantel last Christmas. The leather Russell Angled Sofa, by Minotti, came from Andante (andante.com.hk), the leather armchair was custom made, and the woven Dandelion jute rug was from Armadillo (usa.armadillo-co.com).

The round coffee tables came from Tree (tree.com.hk). The side table, by &Tradition, was from Homeless (homeless.hk) and the wall clock, by Nomon, came from Nature Evolution (natureevolution.com.hk). The decorative objects were from Zara Home (zarahome.com). All the pots and plants in the flat were from Fleurs (fleurs.hk).



Photo: Simon J Nicol

Foyer

The rattan shoe cabinet came from Fuurn (fuurn.com), the artwork was from Society6 (society6.com) and the shelf was from CB2 (cb2.com). The napkin holder came from Nordic Nest (nordicnest.com) and the decorative objects were from Zara Home.



Photo: Simon J Nicol

Office

The home office was conceived pre-pandemic but has proved perfect for the times. The desk and shelving were designed by Volkonskaya and made by Liquid Interiors. The Carl Hansen chair (also used around the dining table) was from Manks (www.manks.com) while the decorative objects were from Zara Home.

The brass and marble dining table in the background came from Organic Modernism (organicmodernism.com), and the sculptural Vapour light from Studio Thier & van Daalen (thiervandaalen.com).



Photo: Simon J Nicol

Kitchen

The kitchen was custom designed by Liquid Interiors and built by Royal Kitchen (royalkitchendesign.com.hk). The Odin taps, by Brizo, were supplied by Royal Kitchen, and the sliding-door handles came from Kawajun (kawajun.biz). Rowena Gonzales discovered that she had to install a double sliding door instead of a single one because of the archway. The rug came from Zara Home.



Photo: Simon J Nicol

Main bedroom

The main bedroom is a haven of neutrals. A bedhead was ordered, but it was too big to bring into the flat, so Kang decided to forgo one; she likes the texture of the plaster wall as is. The bed and linen are the client's own. The brushed-brass suspension lamps came from Flos ([flos.com](https://www.flos.com)), the Valencia side tables from BoConcept ([boconcept.com](https://www.boconcept.com)), the tray from Tree and the cushions and throw from Zara Home.



Photo: Simon J Nicol

Bay window

Kristina Kang's favourite spot in which to relax is the bay window area in the main bedroom, designed by Volkonskaya and built by Liquid Interiors. The tray was from Tree and the loose cushions from Zara Home.



Photo: Simon J Nicol

En Suite

Kang wanted to hide the toilet without closing it off entirely. The solution was an arched privacy screen in this main bedroom en suite, designed by Volkonskaya and made by Liquid Interiors. The mirror and cabinets were also custom designed and made by Liquid Interiors.

The floor and wall tiles, by Lea Ceramiche, came from Home Savoy (151B Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2623 0099). The gleaming metallic sink and bathroom fixtures, by Kohler (from Arnhold; arnhold.com.hk), provide unexpected contrast to the muted surrounds.