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# Breathing Space

*Text / Samantha Leese Images / JJJctcl*



When Tom Bartlett received a message on social media from a celebrity couple in Hong Kong, the British designer thought it might have been a prank. 'It felt very futuristic to me that our client initially contacted us through Instagram, and I was slightly doubtful that it was a real project at the time,' he says. 'But a week later, there we were in Hong Kong, looking at this fantastic apartment.'

The couple, who are involved in the creative scenes in the UK and Sweden, had come across Bartlett's London-based practice Waldo Works in magazines. While the firm has done projects in Asia before, this was its first opportunity to work in Hong Kong.

The 18th-floor duplex apartment in Pok Fu Lam came with an exacting brief from the couple; the lady of the house in particular, says Bartlett, showed an 'impressive and exquisite sense of her own taste and aesthetic'. (So much so, says the designer, that if she gave up modelling he would hire her any day.)

An overarching concern, he explained, was that 'although this project was to be of the finest design output, it was not to appear rich or glitzy, and it was not to be an essay in the display of wealth'. This preference for subtlety, notes Bartlett, is an increasingly common shift in attitude among clients.

The project's key inspirations were Japanese joinery and Scandinavian craft. Central to the space is a raw steamed birch 'spine' with bronze detailing that acts as the warm heart of the residence, says Bartlett.

'There's something quite special about emerging from this timber box into the colours, shapes and textures of the drawing room, and looking out onto the milky blue water of the bay below.'

Among the clients' specific ideas was the dressing room, where they regularly prepare for screen roles and public appearances. The bright, tidy space features a central marble-clad block with custom-lit mirrors and a variety of drawers, each perfectly sized for their accessories and makeup.

Surrounding the block are cedar and copper mesh cupboards with backlit interiors, creating a silhouette of the items inside when closed. A hidden steam room concealed behind a full-height triple mirror was another request. The couple also required script-reading chairs in the library and, most surprisingly to the designer, a proper kitchen with an adaptive dining area for entertaining.

He describes the model's keen domesticity and the glee with which she took out-of-town visitors to hole-in-the-wall cafes and to the finest restaurants overlooking the harbour: 'She cooks with a similar verve, so we wanted the kitchen design to be special as well as central to the apartment.'

Above all, the design sought to create a sense of refuge and meaning as well as beauty in the home of two people who are often in the spotlight. 'When you're regularly observed and approached in the street, as this couple tend to be, there's an obvious relief when you get through your door,' reflects Bartlett. 'When we work with well-known personalities, it's always very clear how important the idea of home is.'

Previous page: This highly specified Hong Kong duplex features script-reading chairs sourced in Sweden and recovered in London with an imported indigo-dyed leather from Japan

This page: A polished-brass Alzabile floor lamp by Azucena and onyx side table by Karakter Copenhagen sit next to a reupholstered D1 Elisabeth sofa by Marta Sala Editions. The printed cushion is from Pierre Frey, while the round pouffe table is a bespoke design by Waldo Works



The couple love to cook and entertain, and a cantilevered marble bench with cushion pads is the perfect seating solution for a long table during dinner parties. The Salinas kitchen system with an olivato ash wood peninsula table (above) is by Patricia Urquiola for Boffi



The intricacy and detailing of the stairwell and timber cladding, along with the soft lighting, 'creates an Asian feel without being too referential or obvious', according to designer Tom Bartlett

