

# Late bloomer

After a year of living in a spartan apartment, a homeowner found inspiration for the interior in the vivid colours of a flower.

Food writer Fox Daniels and her financial-consultant husband spent a year living out of boxes, looking at the bare walls of their half-finished 800 sq ft Central apartment, before her eye lit on a certain flower and she had her eureka moment.

"It was a blue lily," Daniels says. "I loved the combination of the purplish-blue flower and the bright green stem, and if it worked in nature I knew it would work in here. I'm half Moroccan; I like colour."

So she painted the walls purple and used a fresh green on a long row of glossy cupboards beneath the windows. Adding to the cheerful, bohemian palette is a large red medicine chest, a green Chinese-style cupboard and a bright sofa. When her husband raised an eyebrow at the feminine colour combinations, she added a wall of burned black-steel panels, the heat treatment leaving great oil-on-water swirls across the metal, like *moiré* silk.

"I needed to butch it up a bit," she says, laughing. "He's very masculine."

Her husband arrived in Hong Kong four years ago, ahead of Daniels, and bought the apartment, which is sandwiched between SoHo and NoHo on a quiet part of Hollywood Road. He then hired an interior designer to transform the space. Daniels had some long-distance input from the Philippines, where she was teaching and having a house built on remote Sibuyan island. All the walls were knocked out and some furniture had been ordered, but the project was losing momentum by the time she arrived.

"I fired the designer when the US\$100,000 Minotti sofa we had shipped from Italy would not fit in through the front door, despite his insisting it would be no problem," she says.

And so began their year of spartan living. With the designer gone and the flat little more than a shell ("The bedroom was finished, thank goodness"), the couple piled up their possessions in boxes and lived

around them while they contemplated how to proceed.

"I had just built a house on a Philippine island, having everything shipped in, and I thought that if I can do it there, I can definitely do it here," Daniels says. "We've also bought a place in the 'country', near Yuen Long, so we decided to make our place in town eclectic and modern. The house in the New Territories will be inspired more by 1930s Shanghai."

Daniels can draw inspiration from the many homes in which she has lived.

"I stopped counting after my 25th move," she says. "I've lived in tree houses, in converted French barns, on my Asian island, in the best arrondissement in Paris and in conventional apartments in Antwerp."

All that moving has taught her a thing or two about the fine art of ownership. Her possessions are pared back these days and every item has to have a function, which helps to keep the apartment uncluttered. But she also wanted lots of storage for tucking away the paperwork that inevitably builds up when you run a business from home.

With her plans decided, Daniels employed a contractor and gave him a tight deadline of six weeks, while the couple cooled their heels in the Four Seasons. The apartment was finished on time and on budget.

The main space houses the kitchen and the living and dining areas, with one corner serving as a study. A discreet door near the entrance hides a utility and storage room and, on the opposite wall, the steel panels slide back to reveal the bathroom, a walk-in wardrobe and the bedroom. A womb-like windowless alcove, the bedroom has walls lined with padded blood-red leather and the space is entirely filled by a bed dressed in matching red linen.

"We bought the biggest bed we could find and had the room built around it," Daniels says. "My husband is often up >>





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**1** The side table in the living room is an old Louis Vuitton case that Fox Daniels had wheels attached to. Daniels uses it to display antiques she's picked up from all over the world, including a telephone from London's Portobello Market, a letter opener and an ivory business-card holder. The bright sofa was HK\$49,800 from Everything Under the Sun (9/F, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 2554 9088). It was reupholstered for HK\$8,500 by Artura Ficus (20 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, tel: 2527 2893), which also made the purple and green velvet cushions (HK\$800). The beige sofa (HK\$32,000) and Anglepoise Giant 1227 floor lamp, by George Carwardine (HK\$36,000), both came from Lane Crawford (Pacific Place, Admiralty, tel: 2118 3668). The coffee table is a chest from Tequila Kola (1/F, Horizon Plaza, tel: 2877 3295). The long green glass-topped cupboards were designed by Daniels and built for HK\$30,300 by contractor In-Space Design & Decoration (18/F, Gaylord Commercial Building, 114 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 3106 4428).

The white chair is part of the dining set and was HK\$2,800 from Axis (47 Gough Street, Central, tel: 2858 6919). The large red medicine cabinet was HK\$42,000 from The Legends (75A Hollywood Road, Central, tel: 2543 2820).

**2** The office is tucked away in a brightly lit corner. The desk was designed by Daniels, with storage for box files and various electronic office essentials ("Except the printer, which I forgot about"), and built for HK\$13,000 by In-Space Design & Decoration. The vintage red telephone was from Portobello Market. The iPod dock was HK\$2,980 from DG Lifestyle Store (IFC Mall, Central, tel: 2295 4488). The three clocks, from Ikea (various locations; [www.ikea.com.hk](http://www.ikea.com.hk)), are set to Hong Kong, London and New York times. "It's for the stock markets," Daniels says. "We can't live off our art."

**3** The dining table in front of the burned black-steel sliding wall cost HK\$5,390 at G.O.D. (various locations; [www.god.com.hk](http://www.god.com.hk)). The Baccarat carafes and silver tray are family heirlooms.



during the night but he doesn't disturb me – it's very dark in here even if he has the light on while he checks on the markets."

The kitchen has a distinctly professional feel, with surfaces and units finished in stainless steel, which seems appropriate given that Daniels trained as a chef. She has just finished a food book, *The Luxury Lifestyle* ("It's a 'non-diet' book about being healthy by eating food made from the best ingredients"), which involved testing recipes. With the kitchen at the back of the apartment, she needed a chimney of an almost industrial standard to keep the cooking smells at bay. The ductwork stretches right across the living room and out through the external wall.

"I like the look of the exposed metal, so we decided not to cover it up," she says, "although it does sound like a 747 when it's turned on."

It's one of many lessons they will be applying to the renovation of the house in Yuen Long, which will have a larger kitchen and dining area. As for the colour scheme, Daniels has already found her inspiration.

"That painting is coming with us," she says, indicating a red and turquoise painting of high heels on top of the fridge. "Those are my colours for Yuen Long."

## Tried + tested



**Grand entrance** Given her building has just one apartment per floor, Fox Daniels decided to include the lift lobby in her renovation plans. "It had no character and I couldn't stand the look. When the lift opens, the space is all ours and I wanted it to feel like home," Daniels says. So, she had her contractor repanel the walls in white, added a bright light feature and even used the stairwell outside to hang a series of small paintings she created in Bali. "They're my little smudges in the dark," she says. "I like to think I've opened the first gallery in a public staircase."

**4** The kitchen was designed by Daniels and constructed in stainless steel by Ka Yue Design (2/F, Gee Chang Industrial Building, 108 Lok Shan Road, To Kwa Wan, tel: 2713 6398) for HK\$104,000, including the Miele and Smeg appliances. The glass vase was HK\$450 from Tequila Kola.

**5** One of the burned black-steel panels, which cost HK\$24,000 in total, slides back to reveal a walk-in wardrobe that used to be a bedroom. "Most of the clothes in here are my husband's," Daniels says. "He has more shoes than I do." The wardrobe was built by In-Space Design & Decoration for HK\$30,450.

**6** The bathroom is hidden behind another of the burned

black-steel panels. The mirrored cabinet and vanity unit were designed by Daniels and built by Ka Yue Design for HK\$36,000. The stone tiles proved a tough nut to crack. "I planned to put up some pictures, but we broke six drill bits just trying to put up the small mirror," Daniels says.

**7** The king-sized bed entirely fills its small alcove, and has a built-in storage compartment underneath. Like the burned black-steel sliding door and the red leather wall panels (HK\$17,000), it was designed by Daniels and built by Ka Yue Design. The Missoni bed linen and silk flower cushions were bought online (Missonihome.it; Missoni bed linen is also available at Lane Crawford). The toy animals are from Homeless (29 Gough Street, tel: 2581 1880).