Welcome change

After a decade in the same flat, a Mid-Levels resident chose to reflect his shifting tastes by way of a modern makeover.

Text: Catherine Shaw / Pictures: John Butler / Styling: Angela Cornel

It helps when you are friends with your client,” says interior designer Gary Lai, hosting his game over Desmond Kirwin’s newly redecorated apartment on MacDonnell Road, in Mid-Levels. “I’ve known Dan for 50 years and we’ve worked together, so I had a clear idea of what he wanted. He gave me a lot of freedom to create the design.”

Kirwin, managing director of an events production company, says he felt it was time to replace the East-meets-West design concept he was attracted to when he first arrived in Hong Kong from New York some 20 years ago. “Having lived in the flat for over a decade, I started to notice things I would have preferred to have done differently,” he says. “And my tastes have changed. Technology and construction techniques have also improved and I wanted the flat, post its second renovation, to be completely up to date.”

Lai, director of architect and design house Spatial Concept, recommended a lighter, more contemporary sensibility, with an open-plan feel that would not be at odds with Kirwin’s request for an office-study and more storage space. “I was nervous it would feel cramped,” recalls Kirwin, of his two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment, “but [Lai] convinced me the layout would flow well and I am very pleased with the result. The building is about 60 years old, so it has tremendous usable space and although the net area is about 1,000 square feet, most people feel it's closer to 1,500 square feet.”

Lai says the first step was to reconfigure the apartment. “To open up the space, he removed a wall between the living room and master bedroom. Then the entrance to the en-suite bathroom was relocated from near the doorway of the bedroom to the opposite side of the room. Lai introduced a half “wall” between the living room and study, which now features two custom-made desks. A second, more informal, living room or “den” was created using built-in, custom-made furniture along the curved side of the apartment, with views of the city.

A new, lighter wood floor was installed throughout the flat, although the original, darker wood doors were retained to create contrast.

Although almost all the furniture is newly purchased, Kirwin’s antique cocktail bar stayed. “It is a talking point because it is a contrast to the otherwise contemporary look but it still works colour wise,” Lai says.

Trained as an interior architect, Lai says he prefers designs to go beyond the merely decorative. For instance, to resolve the need for increased storage, he created a corridor to the bathroom flanked by floor-to-ceiling cupboards and a dressing table. “It is highly efficient, with drawers”
18.2 Living room The L-shaped linen sofa, featuring an armrest that doubles as a shelf, was from Walter Knoll (www.walterknoll.de; all prices upon application). The Tribeca marble-top coffee table, by Jean-Marie Massaud, cost HK$34,000 at via – Platform (3 Wing, Fung Street, Wan Chai; tel: 3321 3889). The series of three prints on the wall was bought at the London Original Print Fair (www.londonprintfair.com), in Britain. On the adjacent wall, above the console, hangs a photograph called The Irregular Night No. 6, by Ed Ruscha, which came from the Blindspot Gallery, 24 Aberdeen Street, Central, tel: 2537 6238. The pair of suede stools came from Dario Kirin’s previous home. The dark wood Modafo side table (HK$37,000), designed by Antonio Citterio, was bought from B&B Italia, in San Francisco, in the United States, but is also available at www.bibitalia.com. The stone statue under the window was acquired years ago in Bangkok, Thailand. The vintage cocktail bar was bought years ago from an antique shop in New York. The leather armchair, designed by Norman Foster, and the black steel lattice side table next to it came from Walter Knoll. The skateboard (HK$8,000) was designed by Gary Lai of Spatial Concept (25/F, Tai Yo Building, 14 Thomson Road, Wan Chai; tel: 3329 3880). Timber flooring throughout the apartment cost HK$120 per square foot from Equal (22/F, 11 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay; tel: 2881 7066).

3 Second living room A curved window area doubles as a second living room, an ideal spot in which to watch television or enjoy the panoramic views over Hong Kong. The custom-built sofa and coffee table cost HK$22,000 in total and were made by Classical Curtain (23/F, Queen’s Road East, Wan Chai; tel: 2834 8883). The rug was bought years ago. Lai found the solid teak tables (about HK$2,000 each) on a street stall in Bali, Indonesia. The Cobide Suspension ceiling lamp cost HK$3,000 from Artemide (Kowloon Centre, 31 Duddell Street, Central; tel: 2524 0333).

4 Dining room The eight-seat dining table and leather chairs came from Walter Knoll. The two overhead lamps were from Hinwo’s old apartment, The steel and wool rug (about US$1,000) was found at ABC Carpet, in New York (www.abccom). Jing Peng’s EveryWing Illuminates No. 4 on the wall leading to the guest room was from Blindspot Gallery. The three artworks on the opposite wall came from a gallery in Tsim Sha Tsui that has since closed. The grey window blinds were made by Sun Sun Interiors (24 Fanning Road, Wan Chai; tel: 2522 3046) and cost HK$3,500 each.

5 Study The compact study features two work spaces with plenty of built-in storage, designed and built by Spatial Concept for a total of HK$28,000. The two Aerochairs cost HK$8,500 each from Herman Miller (various locations; www.hermanmiller.com). The wall shelving, in a white oak finish matching the floor, was designed and built by Lit at a cost of HK$8,000. The antique doors were bought years ago.
to store shoes and dividers to accommodate belts,” he says. “We avoided an enclosed feeling by creating a dressing table preparation area, which is also a useful space to set things out when getting ready.”

The entire redecoration took just 2½ months, says Kirwin, adding that most people who visit now comment on how open the apartment is.

“This was exactly the plan. The entire flat can be opened, providing lots of room for guests, yet at the same time there are plenty of private areas for quiet conversation and reflection.

“I spend a lot of time working from home, so the study and den serve this purpose well. With the built-in seating, which is something my parents’ house had when I was growing up, it is a very comfortable space in which to watch television, read the paper or enjoy a casual meal.”

**Tried + Tested**

**Let it slide** The original kitchen doors were replaced with a pair of ultra-efficient sliding ones, which fully retract inside recessed grooves to save space. The frosted glass provides privacy. The doors were designed and built by Gary Lai, of Spacial Concept, for HK$90,000. The umbrella stand was a gift.

**6 Master bedroom** The king-size bed came from Kirwin’s previous home. Floor-to-ceiling built-in mahogany cupboards (HK$44,000) were custom made by Lai. The green throw (HK$18,000) came from Hermès (various locations; www.hermes.com). The Talasey lamp was from Artemide and cost HK$2,500. The Massaia side table is the same as before. Lai designed the sliding door (HK$7,000) to fully retract, creating an open-plan ambience, and added spot lighting (HK$450 each) from Zodiac Lighting (70 Morrison Hill Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2882 9082) throughout the apartment.

**7 Bathroom** The Axor taps (HK$4,500 each) and Duravit basins (HK$3,600 each) came from Sunny Pro (193 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2856 0088).

**8 Kitchen** The kitchen was renovated 1½ years ago and its simple modern look needed no update. The Cappello wall lamp (HK$1,600) came from Artemide G/F, Rutland’s Contra, 2 Duddell Street, Central, tel: 2523 0333. The stools (HK$5,800 each) came from Axis Collections (256 Hollywood Road, Sheung Wan, tel: 2858 6959).