

HOMES · FAMILY · ARTS · FOOD · TRAVEL · FASHION · HEALTH · BEAUTY

EXPAT LIVING HONG KONG

EXPATLIVING.HK

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS
Winners!

**KIDS' HOLIDAY CAMPS
& BURGER JOINTS**

**LIVING ROOMS
& A TAI TAM RENO**

**MEET THE
AUTHORS**

Summer Days

**BEST BEACHES
SEASIDE EATS
WHAT TO WEAR**

HARMONY BY THE HARBOUR

PHOTOGRAPHY HAROLD DE PUYMORIN

Interior makeovers can be tricky in Hong Kong's small spaces – but the transformation of this 600-square-foot apartment (with only 400 square feet of indoor space) shows just how much can be achieved. We chat with the homeowner and designer about the project.



Homeowner: Michelle

Where are you from originally? What brought you to Hong Kong, and when?

I'm from Manila. My husband Chris has been living in HK and working in finance since 2007, while the travel tech company I've been with for almost a decade relocated me to Hong Kong back in 2020.

How long have you lived in this apartment? What do you enjoy about it?

We bought the apartment in July 2021. We absolutely love the huge balcony overlooking Victoria Harbour, the high ceiling and the floor-to-ceiling windows that bring in so much light, so that at any time of day the place looks beautiful.

We also love that we're in an up-and-coming hipster restaurant neighbourhood that's just two stations away from Central!





Designer: Iman El Zeky
of Iman El Zeky Studio

What was the apartment like originally?

It was a brand new flat with a minimalist vibe. The atmosphere was very cold due to the grey-tone finishes; and the wood was all in different colours, from doors to plinths to cabinets. It was lacking harmony. And this is the first thing we try to bring into a space.

What did the project entail, and what made you excited to do the work?

The goal was really to bring personality and life to this brand new apartment. What I loved most was the idea to have a blank canvas, and the way Michelle approached me with so much curiosity and excitement herself to get into a design journey. She was willing to make a statement and make it their home. I could feel we would be a good team, communicating with trust to envision their new interior, then taking risks and making it happen. I also loved the challenge of trying to exceed her expectations.



In the end, we were able to accomplish exactly what a designer should provide: to design not only décor but an interior telling the owners' story and elevating their lifestyle.

How did you approach the issue of the apartment's small space?

It would have been difficult to find nice-looking furniture to fit the exact size of this apartment – and proportions are key in design. When you approach a small space, despite what people might think, you generally need pieces of note – instead of accumulating small pieces – to give the feeling of a bigger space. So we knew right away that we would need bespoke furniture to optimise every square inch in the style we wanted, while bringing comfort to Michelle and Chris in their daily life. So everything has been tailored to them, to their own preferences and the space requirements.

We also used height to add to this feeling of space: for example, by adding floor-to-ceiling storage, artwork to the walls, and a large floating pendant lamp in the dining room. This is a decoration tip to every small space owner: the sky is the limit!


What are some of the key features of the transformation that you're most pleased with?

The view from this flat is amazing, right on Victoria Harbour. And with such a nice ceiling height and windows all along the apartment, the first thing I wanted to do was to "capture" the light inside. This is a challenge, as brighter doesn't necessarily mean more cosy. I knew we would have to play with textures and shades of colours to bring more layers and depth. I'm really happy to have worked with local decorative painter Kwan's Palette to bring such a nice texture to the walls. The Italian limestone feel, along with the shades we selected, create such a beautiful and natural "envelope" to the space.

Since our signature is to work with artists from around the world, I'm also happy to have curated artworks that contribute to making the home so special and unique – including the painting in the living room of Joshua Tree, a very special travel destination for Michelle and Chris.

What's coming up in 2023 and beyond?

One thing we're doing this year is travelling with projects, including to Greece and France. And since we keep designing bespoke furniture for our clients, we're now offering made-to-order pieces that we have designed; these include our Charlie side table, a tribute to Charlotte Perriand (1903-1999), the French architecture legend who is one of my timeless design inspirations.

Iman El Zeky Studio
6923 2948 | @imanelzeky | imanelzeky.com 



What led you to hiring Iman El Zeky Studio for your home transformation?

We wanted something that was personal and creative. We wanted our home to feel like a home that has a soul, and not something that was copy-and-pasted from Pinterest.

For a few weeks, I tried doing the design and sourcing by myself. But I failed miserably! And that's what got me looking on Instagram for interior designers and decorators. I stumbled upon Iman's Instagram and I was drawn to her unique style and design approach. We had a coffee chat and I could tell how she really tried to get to know me and Chris at that meeting – our personality, our happy memories, our travels and way of living.

Iman is also very bold and daring in her design approach, and that's what I loved about it too. There was an element of surprise that made the whole design journey exciting and memorable.

What were the key features of the design brief?

We wanted the design to be a reflection of who we are and the way we live. It had to be personal and intentional while maximising every square inch of the apartment.

Were you involved in different aspects of the project?

Absolutely! Iman was very collaborative throughout the whole design and renovation process. She also brings an artistic approach to home design, so working with her allowed me to discover new artists – some of their pieces you can find in our home today.



What are some of your favourite aspects of the makeover?

There are so many things I love about the renovated apartment! The limewash paint on all our walls by Kwan of Kwan's Palette Limited gives the apartment so much character and texture. I also love the handmade cushions in the living room – they're by an emerging textile artist in the UK, Alessandra Williams – and also the commissioned painting of Joshua Tree in California by French artist Ingrid Winkler, which reminds Chris and me of our epic road trip in the California desert. Then there are the vintage finds such as the Campari poster and the African mask found in the Chelsea Flea Market, which also remind us of our travels.