

## HOME &amp; GARDEN



personal space

# A blend of east and west

A lover of Chinese antiques manages to showcase them in a home that is furnished in a contemporary yet warm and cosy style. **By Corinne Kerk**

**M**ANY like collecting Chinese antiques, but not all are adept at displaying them. Which is why Carl Schelfhaut's penthouse unit at the Laguna 88 condominium near Bedok is a testament of how Oriental antiques and a contemporary lifestyle can marry tastefully in a soft blend of east and west.

It all began when the vice-president at Deutsche Post World Net and DHL Global Mail bought the 2,013 sq ft, three-bedroom apartment in November 2006 after a single viewing.

"It was the first place I visited after selling my previous apartment in Sembawang," says the Belgian and Singapore permanent resident who has lived in the city state since 2001. "It's intuition. I liked it the moment I saw it."

An avid cook of mostly Asian cuisine, Mr Schelfhaut wanted an open concept kitchen and a sense of spaciousness in the house. Describing his taste as being "a lit-

tle bit conservative and timeless" with a preference for "traditional values", he also wanted lots of light during the day and warmth and cosiness in the evenings.

He adds: "I can do away with a lot, but not my antiques. They stay with me."

This means the layout of the two-storey apartment had to be designed around his collection. After shortlisting a few designers, the 50-year-old Mr Schelfhaut decided to collaborate with Ed Ong from Dwell Interior Design, because the latter understood what he was trying to achieve.

The first decision was to knock down the kitchen walls and remove a small toilet in the yard to create a bright, open-concept kitchen whose centre of focus is a long and wide black granite counter top.

This also led to a seamless flow of space between the kitchen and living room areas - which form the heart of the home - with the two guestrooms and common bath on the same floor.

There is also plenty of well-designed storage space. "One of my hang ups is I can't stand seeing things lying around," he explains. The storage includes thoughtful touches, such as two-sided cabinets in

the kitchen so access is from both sides, and mirrored closets in the bedrooms to increase the sense of space.

Upstairs, a loft outside the master bedroom has been turned into a study. The design, which leans towards the traditional, features open bookcases with dark-stained wood veneer, built to incorporate an antique rosewood writing table.

The study leads to the master bedroom, whose highlight is a dramatic bed with a full-height quilted headboard that continues into a ceiling feature. Facing the bed stands an antique cabinet which is flanked on either side by a walk-in wardrobe and bathroom - entrances of which are concealed behind wood veneer clad sliding panels.

Two bare patios upstairs have also been dressed up with wooden decks so Mr Schelfhaut can take in unobstructed views and cool breezes.

Most importantly, the antiques and artefacts that he has lovingly collected for over 20 years are given the respect they deserve. To help showcase them, a stretch of wall in the living room was treated with a gold-hued textured wall covering that befits these unique pieces.

**HAPPY MARRIAGE**

Clockwise from top left, antiques in the dining room are displayed in such a way as to achieve a cohesive look; the centrepiece of the master bedroom is the bed with a full-height quilted headboard that continues into a ceiling feature; outside the master bedroom is a loft that has been converted into a study. It incorporates open bookshelves and an antique rosewood writing table

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ARTHUR LEE

The antiques, most of them Chinese, include an interesting stack of wooden plates in a carrier from China, a Chinese jewellery box that is about 150 to 200 years old, a Nepalese cabinet that's more than a century old and an antique copper-bronze horse shipped from Cambodia that is a few hundred years old.

Along with these are other vintage items of personal value such as pen drawings of composers Ludwig van Beethoven and Giuseppe Verdi done by his grandfather, a violinist, in 1933.

"Antiques look nice and they exude warmth," says Mr Schelfhaut of his collection. "They are timeless while modern furniture is time-limited - after a certain period, you have to change them. I wouldn't want to look at the kitchen counter for half an hour, there's no heart to it, it's cold. But with an antique cabinet, I can find details to discover all the time. People have worked so long on it that that in itself is worth the appreciation."

Quintessential in a home to him is "a welcoming warmth". "What I've noticed over the years is that many homes across Asia do not reflect such warmth. Furniture is randomly placed around the house, in particular in living and dining areas, showing a bit of a mismatch at times, and lighting is very often naked neon lights or bare daylight tubes. Of course, each and every budget is different, but I still believe that interior decoration is very essential in our current hectic life."

And even if all you have are a few pieces of antiques, Mr Schelfhaut - who incidentally, can read and speak Chinese - says a big budget is not necessary in order to achieve a cohesive look. "It's about taking time to collect things and making them look nice."

For instance, sitting on an antique Chinese sideboard are a pair of table lamps from Ikea with a nice bronze tone that blends well with the vintage furniture, as

well as a basket for which he paid less than \$10. "I just put some dried flowers in it and it looks nice." And hanging above that is a huge mirror framed with hand-hammered copper in a "modest and serene design" from India - an item he inherited from the occupants of a previous apartment.

Then there is a bamboo magazine rack he picked up from a flea market for \$5, which shares floor space with a 19th century Chinese dowry basket and an antique Chinese washing basin. He also adds to the mix replicas, such as a pair of scrolls from a Taiwanese museum, a Greek icon in solid wood and Chinese tea sets from museums in Taiwan and Singapore.

"With a little creativity and imagination, things work," he says. "Be inventive. After all, isn't it nice to come home to a warm and welcoming hideaway that appeals to the eye?"

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**OPEN CONCEPT**

The kitchen walls were torn down, resulting in a bright, airy kitchen the focus of which is a long and wide black granite counter top