



Raised in Hong Kong, educated in Canada and England and based in Shanghai since 2007, Christina Luk, 36, opened her practice Lukstudio in early 2012, focusing on interior design for food and beverage establishments. Shortly after, she came across a dilapidated rooftop apartment stockpiled on the fourth floor of a 1930s building in central Shanghai, and decided to use it to put her solo talents into practice.

“The house was in a sorry state; one person lived there alone with a lot of pets,” recounts Luk, going through the photos of the space before renovation. To make the 85sqm inhabitable, Luk rid the space of dividing walls and corridors and created a unique spacious volume comprising dining area and kitchen. This main room extends into a glass box open on three sides, shielding light with low-heat glass panels and electric drop-down curtains.

Through sapient partitioning of unused corners near the entrance, she even managed to carve out space for a minuscule studio corner and a guest room, leaving the modest remainder for the sleeping area. “Modern houses are all about common space,” she says. “You don’t need a big bedroom, especially in cities.”

To cope with the outside traffic noises and the irksome damp chill of Shanghai’s winter, Luk added structural features to the construction, such as floor heating underneath ▶

To make the apartment really her own, Luk redesigned structural features of the space, such as a glass box in the living terrace and the staircase leading to the terrace (left). This allowed plenty of light to flood the lower level of the house (right, bottom) and gave easy access to the upper level (right, top)

BOX FRESH

DESIGNING HER HOME/OFFICE AS A FIRST INDEPENDENT PROJECT IN CHINA, ARCHITECT CHRISTINA LUK LEARNED THROUGH EXPERIENCE THE HURDLES OF RENOVATING BUILDINGS FOR PERSONAL USE.



Story by **Andrea Fenn**
Photos by **Rolento Ong** and
Tristan Chapuis

Project: Apartment 7
Architect: Lukstudio
Location: Shanghai, China





the sandblasted blue limestone tiles of the living area, radiators and insulation concealed inside the outer walls. Nonetheless, a few fittings still allude to the historical setting of the apartment, like the vintage window frames in cast metal and individual glass panels, and the Art Deco mosaic tiles in the bathrooms, which reference the multicolor terrazzo pavement of the building's staircase.

Every piece of furniture was designed by Luk and commissioned to local contractors, from the sandstone kitchen tops with stainless steel back panels, matte-finished for easier cleaning, to the wooden shelves fitted with black mirrors at the back to enlarge the sensation of depth.

Yet beside Luk's single-handed efforts, the influence of her husband, a French railway engineer with a passion for sailing, is also visible throughout the house. Barometers and other boating paraphernalia find space on the shelves, and wood veneer paneling runs through the length of the walls to conceal storage space like in a yacht cabin. "He wanted a lot of storage, and in the end it was

Making the most out of every square meter, Luk redesigned the kitchen area as a common space with a white matte sandstone surface (below) that has become the main gathering spot for the household, which include's Luk's husband (left, top) and puppy (right, top).







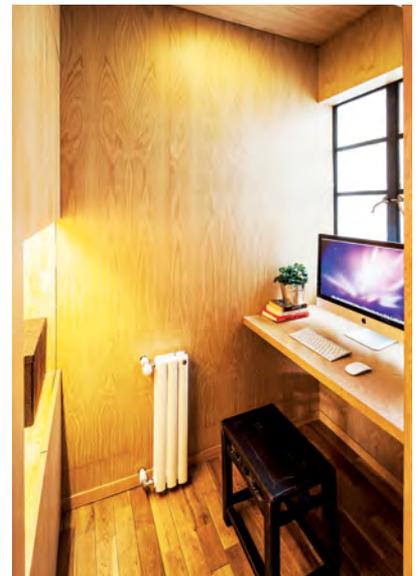
a good call," she says. "Architects often forget that stuff tends to pile up in apartments."

And just like the deck in a yacht, the strongpoint of the house is the upstairs terrace. Taking up more than the entire interior surface and offering an unobstructed view of the surrounding districts, the open-air level of the house has contributed to Luk's claim to fame as a tremendous party organizer. "My friends even suggested that I should rent it out for private events or charge for entry," she says, laughing.

Here too, a major overhaul was necessary before the once-ramshackle outdoor space could reveal all its social potential. The most daunting issue, Luk recounts, was a hole in the ceiling that had been patched with corrugated board and become a receptacle for litter, which she covered with reinforced concrete and a small ceiling window.

To facilitate access and walkability, she designed a steel and wood staircase connected to the living room glass box, laid the floor anew with carbonized pinewood paneling, and fenced the perimeter of the terrace with black metal railings. Thanks to these interventions (and also to a lush assortment of plants nurtured by the green thumb of Luk's husband), this urban garden now contrasts handsomely with the nearby skyline of the city's business center.

Luk admits her house was her first real shot at residential architecture in China, and an invaluable lesson for her next projects with Lukstudio. In



The two main indoor areas of the house are the common space (left) and the sleeping area (top). The remainder of the house is guided by the thrifty principles of boatmaking, with wood paneling hiding the storage area and allowing space for a small bathroom (above, left), and even a miniature studio (above, right).

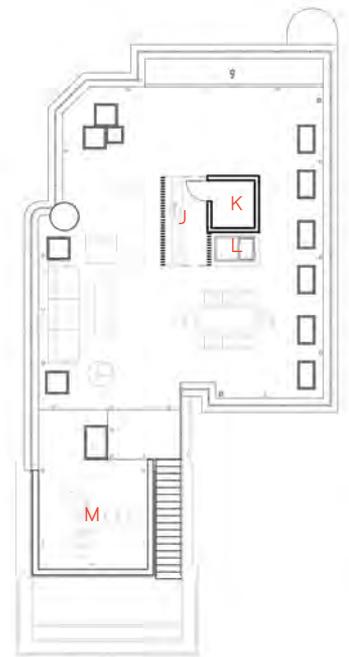


particular, through the renovation she had to get acquainted with the different materials, especially timber, available for construction in the country (“Wood is like people - there are stronger ones and weaker ones,” she muses). She also learned the subtle art of supervising and bartering with contractors, who in China tend to rebuff small individual projects for larger-scale and more profitable construction ventures.

Learning is never-ending, she points out; and that is why despite the formidable result obtained with her “first time”, Luk cannot refrain from keeping a critical eye when judging her work. “With this project, I understood that architecture is a function of time and effort and that everything can be done,” she says. “In the next house I renovate, I will definitely do a better job!” ■■■



Main Floor



Rooftop

Apartment 7
Floor Plan

- A Storage Room
- B Study Room
- C Bedroom
- D Dining Room/Kitchen
- E Wash Room

- F Shower Room
- G Master Bedroom
- H Living Room
- I Planter
- J Bar

- K Exterior Storage
- L Skylight
- M Deck

The terrace is undoubtedly the centerpiece of Luk's home, and it's no wonder she spends most of her down time there with her loved ones (below). To enhance atmosphere and functionality in the space, a verdant selection of plants (left, top) and a barbecue station (left, below) welcome the frequent guests at Luk and her husband's famed terrace parties.

