It’s not often that Leonard Cohen lifts your day. But it is the melancholy musical bard who puts a spring in the step of the Post Magazine team photographing the Mid-Levels apartment of gallerist, art historian and filmmaker Sundaram Tagore.

“It’s him doing a Humphrey Bogart,” chirps our stylist, looking at the portrait of Cohen that commands attention the minute you walk through the door.

“I’m Your Man is playing,” adds this fan of the high priest of pathos, ears trained on the tormented melodies grumbling through the flat.

The Lee Waisler painting of the musician that hangs in the living room is just one of many artworks provoking wonder and discussion in the 2,500 sq ft apartment of Indian-born Tagore, his American wife, Kelly, and their six-year-old daughter, Mia.

“I didn’t even know who the person was [when I bought the painting],” says Tagore, who opened his eponymous gallery on Hollywood Road in 2008. “What I really liked was its tactile quality and how I could enter his spirit.”

To Tagore, more important than identifying the subject or its provenance is the reaction he has to an artwork. “Why is it telling me to look at it and to have it in my home?” he says.

Not surprisingly, there is art wherever you look in this three-bedroom rental apartment, into which the couple moved in 2011.

“I wanted something with a colonial flavour and I needed space because we entertain quite a bit,” says Tagore.

Kelly adds, “I said, ‘All I need is an office [see Tried + tested] and a big dining room.’”

The apartment was in excellent condition and boasted a well-equipped kitchen that can be closed off from the long dining area, which segues into the living room. It’s here that Mia does her homework and family dinners are eaten. It’s also where Ken Heyman photographs are displayed, showing, among other images, Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra in the early 1960s.

Although the flat was in good shape, the couple had to quickly furnish it from scratch, having decamped from New York with just books, clothes and toys.
“We had to get everything done instantly because we held a party for 120 people for [photographer] Robert Polidori about a month after we moved in,” says Kelly, a former editor for the *Martha Stewart Living* magazine. “So we went running all over Hong Kong and had everything done as fast as possible. The carpet, table, bench, chairs… we did it all in one go.”

If that all seems too easy, it’s because the couple knew what they wanted, have similar tastes and are old hands when it comes to refurbishing homes. “We’ve done this so many times,” says Kelly, referring to residences in New York, Singapore and now Venice, where Tagore is staging a major show at the biennale next year featuring artists from 30 countries.

That show will tie in with his interest in globalisation and the convergence of cultures, a theme that runs through the art in their apartment, which includes works by Ricardo Mazal, Denise Green, Sohan Qadri and Hiroshi Senju, among others. Tagore explains that this patchwork of international art reflects his philosophy of being part of a third culture, which he calls a “culture of entanglement”.

“It speaks of who we are and what we’re about,” he says.

Tagore, a descendant of poet and polymath Rabindranath Tagore, hails from Calcutta, in India, and it is to his childhood he points when discussing Kelly’s favourite piece of art in the flat: a 1978 Annie Leibovitz photograph of Muhammad Ali. The image, which shows the boxer reclining on red-carpeted stairs in Chicago, has pride of place in the master bedroom.

1 Living room The two armchairs, long bench featuring silver leafing and tall Chinese cabinet were all custom made by Chine Gallery (424 Hollywood Road, Central, tel: 2543 0023). Beside the cedars (Kelly and daughter Mia take lessons together) is a banana fibre basket from Ikea (various locations; www.ikea.com.hk). The portrait of Leonard Cohen, by Lee Waisler, came from the Sundaram Tagore Gallery (57 Hollywood Road, Central, tel: 2581 9678). The round coffee table came from Dex Home (36 Queen’s Road East, Wan Chai, tel: 2526 7262). The cfuede rugs were picked up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the large sea grass rug came from a shop that has since closed. The glass shelves, for audio-visual equipment, came with the flat. Above them, the television niche was filled in with drywall and Susan Weil’s *Rotor*, from the Sundaram Tagore Gallery, was hung.

2 Dining area Behind the lacquered dining table, custom made by Chine Gallery, is a wall, upholstered in suede, hung with Ricardo Mazal’s *Odenwald*, an oil-on-linen work from the Sundaram Tagore Gallery. Hans Wegner’s Wishbone chairs, which came from Lane Crawford Home Store (Pacific Place, Admiralty, tel: 2118 3652), surround the table, on which are alabaster votives from Tree (various locations; www.tree.com.hk) and a moss arrangement by Kelly. The untitled work to the far right, by Sohan Qadri, came from the Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

3 Master bedroom Beside the bed hangs a photograph of Muhammad Ali. The Eileen Grey-style side table came from JMStyle (various locations; www.jmstyle.com.hk). The Sential floor lamp, Filista pendant lamp and black-and-white cushion were all from Ikea. The bird cushion came from Artisans Angkor (www.artisansangkor.com), in Cambodia.
“I was in boarding school in India at that time,” says Tagore.

“He was such a sensation in the 70s, when I was growing up [in Portland, Oregon],” adds Kelly.

They recall Ali’s famous taunts, his big matches and the polarising effect of his stance against the Vietnam war.

All of which underscores how art, in big and small ways, can provoke cross-cultural exchange.