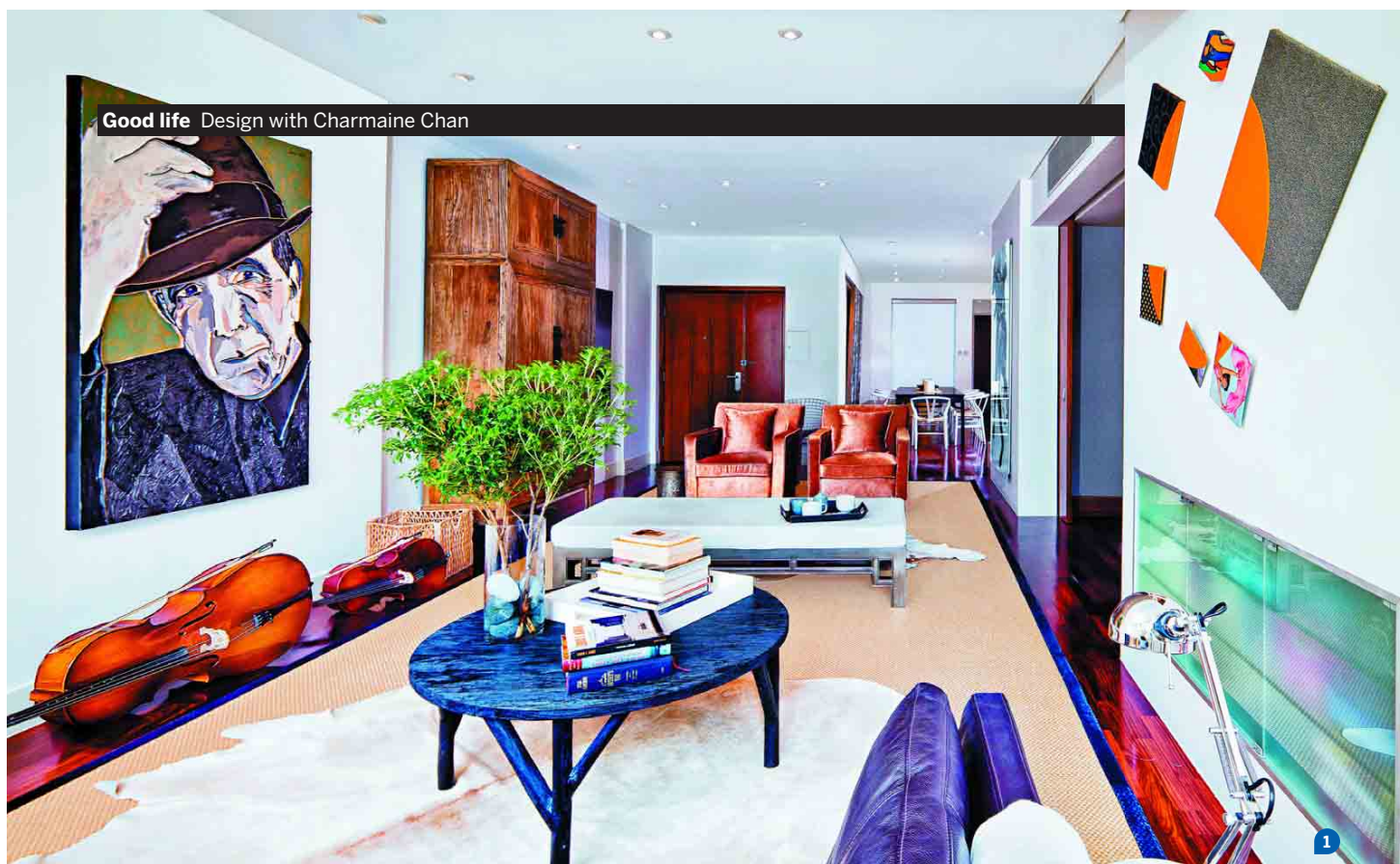


Good life Design with Charmaine Chan



HOME

# The exhibitionists

Gallerist Sundaram Tagore's 2,500 sq ft Mid-Levels flat is filled with artwork that speaks volumes about his family.

Text **Charmaine Chan** / Styling **David Roden** / Photography **John Butlin**

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.

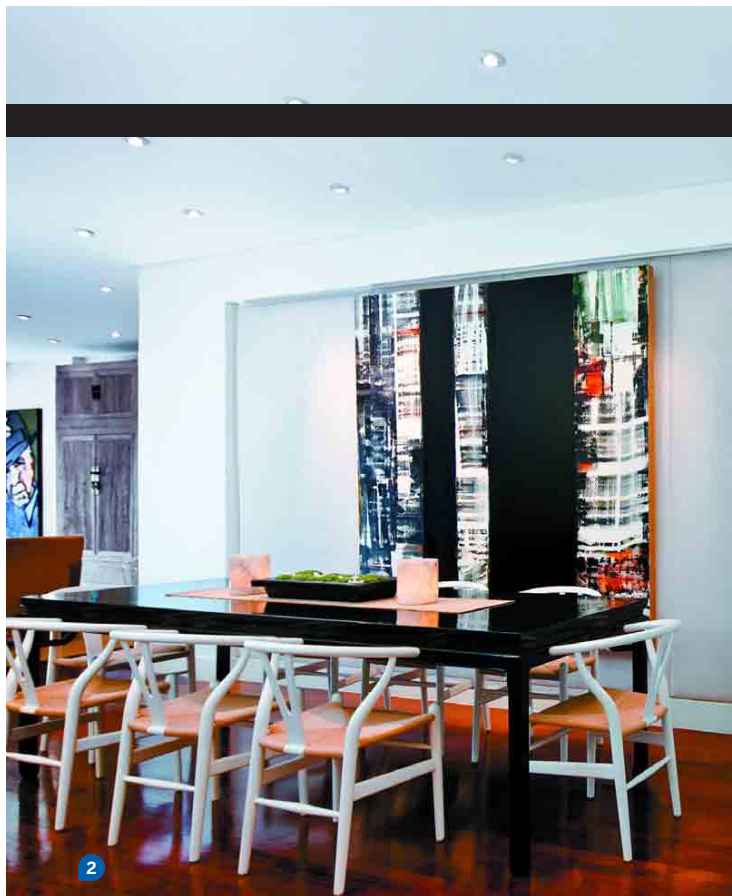
Not surprisingly, there is art wherever you look in this three-bedroom rental apartment, into which the couple moved in 2011.

"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.



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"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. »



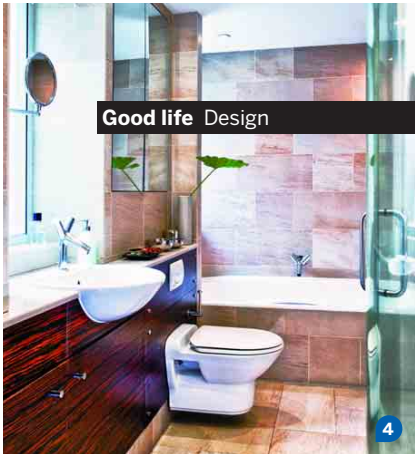
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**1 Living room** The two armchairs, long bench featuring silver leafing and tall Chinese cabinet were all custom made by Chine Gallery (42A Hollywood Road, Central, tel: 2543 0023). Beside the cellos (Kelly and daughter Mia take lessons together) is a banana-fibre basket from Ikea (various locations; [www.ikea.com.hk](http://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 Ovo Home (16 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, tel: 2526 7226). The cowhide 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 vases from Tree (various locations; [www.tree.com.hk](http://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 Gray-style side table came from JMStyle (various locations; [www.jmstyle.com.hk](http://www.jmstyle.com.hk)). The Samtid floor lamp, Fillsta pendant lamp and black-and-white cushion were all from Ikea. The bird cushion came from Artisans Angkor ([www.artisansdangkor.com](http://www.artisansdangkor.com)), in Cambodia.

**Good life** Design



"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.



**4 Master en suite** The bathroom, like much of the flat, was in good shape and left untouched.

**5 Kitchen** Five photographs by Ken Heyman adorn a wall in the large kitchen, which accommodates a marble-topped table and Bertioia-style chairs from Tequila Kola (various locations; [www.tequilakola.com](http://www.tequilakola.com)). The pewter pedestal came from Greenfingers Florist (Tung Tze Terrace, 6 Aberdeen Street, Central, tel: 2827 8280).

**6 Mia's room** The dandelion pendant lamp was from Ikea. The

mini chair accommodating a doll came from Homeless (29 Gough Street, Central, tel: 2581 1880).

**7 Office** Off the living room is an office-cum-study (see *Tried + tested*) shared by the family. The painting, *Waterfall*, by Hiroshi Senju came from the Sundaram Tagore Gallery. Also from the gallery was the bronze sculpture, *Donna Seduta*, by Fernando Botero. The two antique Japanese lacquer candlesticks were a gift. The Eames Eiffel Wire Base chair came from Aluminium (various locations; [www.aluminium-furniture.com](http://www.aluminium-furniture.com)).



**TRIED + TESTED**

**Have your work cut out** Being able to conceal the work space behind bi-fold doors meant the office could be used as an extension to the living area. Behind the doors is a large desk that can accommodate two people and has vertical space in which to stash paperwork, pin reminders and more. The far left quarter is a floor-to-ceiling bookcase.