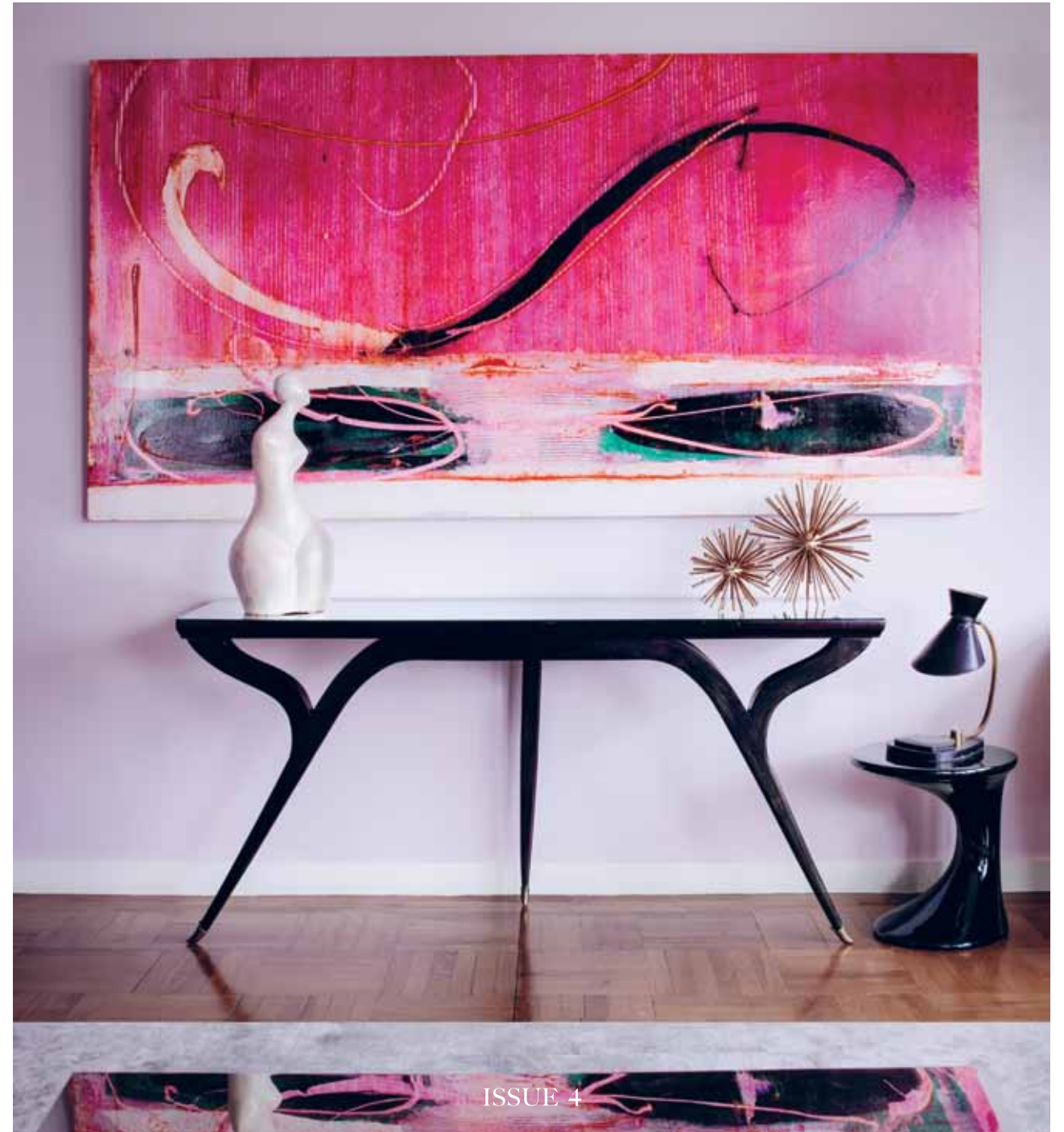


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# Another place and time

Text / Michele Koh Morollo Images / Wesley Lam

As managing director of Hong Kong real estate and investment company Goldig and founder of design firm ACTS Studio, Carl Gouw certainly understands the impact that good design can have on a property; the work he has done on his 500-square-metre home, which he shares with his parents in Jardine's Lookout, Hong Kong is testimony to this.

A lavishly decked out, sophisticated gem that whisks one away from Hong Kong into a classical European *mise en scène*, this project, which Gouw worked on together with architect Roger Hackworth of Collaborate, is an ode to refinement.

Gouw, who has been interested in architecture since he was a child, says he fell in love with hotels and began studying spaces and design trends at the age of ten. In his twenties, he underwent an apprenticeship with the late, renowned Australian interior designer Simon Jackson, who was a friend to and well-loved designer for many of Hong Kong's elite families. Jackson had worked on the interiors of many of the Gouw family's properties and businesses, and he took Carl under his wing.

It was in fact Jackson who created the original interior for this property, where Gouw grew up with his parents Alex and Mary and his sister Elizabeth. Now, as a full-fledged interior designer in his own right, Gouw pays tribute to his late mentor with a facelift that respects and complements Jackson's design concept.

'I worked within the awkward, existing building envelope but rearranged the entire layout to create a new look. Aesthetically, we wanted to respect the neo-classicism from the previous renovation by Jackson,' says Gouw, who believes that a good work of design has to have aesthetic value, express character, perform spatially, be able to accommodate its programme and foresee changing usage.

Though the aesthetics are decidedly luxurious, the house is not at all garish or showy. Valuable objets d'art, paintings, gilded finishings and antiques imbue the space with an aristocratic grace, but clean lines and more earthy, contemporary materials bring the pomp down a notch, so the house still feels like a comfortable, functional home that people can romp about in, or simply relax and put their feet up.

'We went for the "European opulent" look that many home owners seem to gravitate to in Hong Kong and China, but this look often comes across as stilted in small spaces,' says Gouw, who thankfully was not at all constrained by space here. By exercising much discernment, Gouw and Hackworth managed to avoid the impersonal or pretentious feel that can sometimes permeate the houses and apartments of the region's nouveau riche who attempt this style. An abundance of soft landscaping, plenty of natural light and creepers growing along the wall outside the terrace blanket the house in warmth and cosiness. 'We were very careful about not using chandeliers and instead used cornices and borders of the right proportions at the right places,' says Gouw.

In the entrance to the Gouw family residence in Jardine's Lookout, the floor is made of an intricate marquetry of rare marble and semi-precious stones



Split levels create pockets of space, including a basement dining room that opens to an outdoor *koi* pond, a family room and a formal living room with French windows that opens to a neo-Palladian pool and terrace. Aside from a communal dining room and kitchen, Gouw's section of the house is separated from that of his parents, so both he and his parents have complete privacy. 'We started with the exterior and a few dominant crafted features, then worked on an interior envelope to create layers. It was Hackworth who worked on the layers and chose the colours. My side of the house is more casual than my parents' but the whole house has a coherent style,' says Gouw.

A 19th-century French ebony secretaire, a gilded Venetian chair and an oil painting by Chinese artist Chen Yan Ning adorn the living room. Gouw also wanted a gate, timber windows, Petra dure/semi-precious stone flooring and various other furnishings to be incorporated into the design. Hackworth worked around these key pieces by creating complementary bronze ceilings, balustrades and trims that were robust yet streamlined enough to counterbalance the more antiquated and ornate elements in the house. Approachable fabrics, stones and paints were used to balance luxury with a touch of modern naturalism.

'In terms of taste, this house has to satisfy everyone,' says Gouw. 'It reflects our family unit. It's like a masterpiece we worked on together and is very controlled and structured.'

The ground floor family room provides a comfortable environment for the family to relax when they are not entertaining. An ornate late 19th-century Italian mirror hangs above a custom sofa. The two side chairs are early 20th-century European and sit atop a custom rug





Upstairs in the formal living room, where the Gouws often entertain, two custom sofas face each other; above one hangs *Venice* (1989) by Chang Yi-Hsiung. The two gold-gilt framed chairs are French 19th-century and were purchased at auction. Completing the mix are a Tom Dixon floor lamp and a custom metal and marble coffee table



This page: Two gold-gilt framed French 19th-century armchairs upholstered in yellow silk are bathed in sunlight from the small courtyard adjacent to the living room



Facing page: An ornate French *ormolu*-inlaid desk in the living room provides a space for Carl Gouw to work from home. On the wall behind is an oil painting by an old master, purchased on a trip to Europe



This page: Two gold-gilt framed French 19th-century armchairs flank an intricate marquetry-inlaid cabinet by David Linley of London

Facing page: In the lower-level dining room, low ceilings are lined with antique mirror tiles to create a sense of extra height. The ornate gold Rococo candelabras are 19th century and were originally from Dunrobin Castle, Scotland. The custom red leather dining chairs provide a rich contrast to the otherwise neutrally coloured space





This page: Upstairs in the master bedroom is a small sitting area with a custom sofa. The shelves are lined with treasures and books collected by the family



Facing page: The custom gold-gilt claw-footed bed in the master bedroom



Outside, an antique fountainhead keeps watch over the pool and its leafy surrounds