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Hallway The orange Ogi Armchair (HK\$17,580) and print (HK\$1,800) were from BoConcept (boconcept.com). Interior designer Max Lam (maxlam.com) custom built the cabinet (HK\$12,000) and mirror (HK\$3,800).

INTERIORS

Let there be light

An interior designer employed all the tricks in his arsenal to turn a dark, old-fashioned house in Yuen Long into a bright, airy, award-winning family home.

TEXT **OLIVER GILES**
PHOTOGRAPHY **MAX LAM DESIGNS**

It seemed simple on paper. A young couple with two children, a two-year-old and a six-month-old, asked Max Lam Tsz-hong to modernise their 1,400 sq ft, three-storey house in Yuen Long. The property didn't require reconfiguring, just brightening up. So far, so good.

But when Lam, of Max Lam Designs, visited the house, he realised it wouldn't be that easy.

"The previous owner had lived in the house for 20 to 30 years," he says. "Inside, the decor was old-fashioned and it was very, very dark. It felt like there wasn't enough air in the house."

At least the space was well planned. The ground floor includes a foyer, a storeroom and a small toilet as well as an open-plan kitchen and a dining area that leads out on to a 600 sq ft terrace. Above that are the living room and an en-suite master bedroom. On the top level are the children's room, a bathroom and an en-suite guest room.

Determined to let in extra light, Lam began investigating where he could add windows to the house. He discovered a disused water tank on top of the staircase house on the roof and removed it to install a skylight.

"A skylight would bring light down into the centre of the house," he says. "It even made the space feel more airy."

Lam added another window by the top of the stairs, just below the skylight, and replaced the handrails with clear glass panels, allowing light from the roof to filter right into the living room.

Installing glass where the staircase had been walled off had another, unintended, effect. "The kids can see when mummy is coming downstairs and turn the TV off before she gets there," Lam says.

The designer didn't want the artificial light to feel a poor second to the enhanced sunlight. "We used a mixture of decorative lighting, down spotlighting, wall lighting," Lam says. "This means the lighting can



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Stairwell To ensure sunlight from the skylight reaches the lower floors, Lam replaced a wall in the stairwell with glass. Downstairs, in the living room, are a Cupertino desk (HK\$9,199) and chair (HK\$2,629) from BoConcept.



Living room Lam designed and installed a bookshelf (HK\$42,000) that draws attention to the height of the ceiling in the living room. The sofa (HK\$38,735), rug (HK\$9,000), coffee tables (HK\$3,699 each) and Imola chair and ottoman (HK\$39,258 for both) all came from BoConcept.



Master bathroom The hotel-spa-inspired bathroom features a wooden privacy screen (see *Tried + tested*), counter (HK\$12,500) and stone countertop (HK\$9,000) all designed by Lam. The wall tiles (HK\$80 per square foot) were from Pacific Collection (bathpacific.com).

serve different purposes. The owners often invite family and friends over for parties, so they like to have lighting modes. It can be bright, or party mode, or romantic.” Because the couple work from home, it was important for some rooms to be as multifunctional as the lighting. “In the bedroom and living area we installed desks and in the dining room there’s obviously a big table,” Lam says. “And there’s space for the kids to play alongside them in all the rooms.” The owners also requested that Lam connect the ground floor with the 600 sq ft garden, which originally felt detached from the house. “We heightened part of the garden wall, so it was the same height as the kitchen wall,” Lam explains. “This gives more privacy, but we then covered the external wall in the same tiles we used in the

kitchen. The tiles are perfectly aligned, so it all feels like one space.” Lam repeated this trick with the flooring, using the same floor tiles in the kitchen and dining room as on the terrace steps outside. In the living area, Lam added a dramatic open-front, built-in cabinet. “The bookshelf is an optical illusion; it extends the height of the space,” he says. “It draws your eyes upwards and also draws attention to the internal window on the staircase.” Lam’s innovative renovation of the house won him an award in this year’s A’ Design Competition, which is for designers who want to highlight their work to attract the attention of the media and buyers. “All I wanted was for the house to feel more spacious, lighter, airy,” he says. “I think it’s worked out well.” ■



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Kitchen and terrace The white floor tiles in the kitchen and on the terrace steps (HK\$80 per square foot) were from Pacific Collection. Kitspert (kblhk.com) built the kitchen for HK\$120,000, excluding appliances. The bar stools came from the clients' previous home. The white Konstantin Grcic Chair_One (HK\$3,000) was from Magis (magis.com.hk). The glass dining table (HK\$11,690) and Ottawa grey dining chair (HK\$4,989) were from BoConcept, which was also the source for the Adelaide grey chairs (HK\$4,247 each) and coffee tables (HK\$1,589 and HK\$1,499) on the terrace.



Master bedroom The bed (HK\$15,800) and wall-to-wall desk (HK\$22,000) were designed and installed by Lam. The wall lamps came from the clients' previous home. The desk lamp (HK\$3,959) was from BoConcept. The oak flooring (HK\$60 per square foot) came from Quick Step (quick-step.com.hk).



TRIED + TESTED

Screen sensation "The couple wanted the master bathroom to feel like a spa," Max Lam says. "They said they wanted it to feel like they were on vacation in Thailand or Bali." With limited space to play with, Lam knew he would have to create the spa aesthetic through his use of materials rather than any major bathroom furniture. "I decided not to use a lot of marble or gold or brass, to just keep it clean. There's a big window in the bathroom. It's frosted glass, so very private, but I installed a wooden panel along it to make it feel more luxurious and romantic. It still lets plenty of natural light in, but the wood also looks good under artificial light at night." The wooden screen cost HK\$13,000.

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