



# Home and away

A former east London shoe factory reflects its creators' taste for travel and crafts. By Carolyn Asome



**SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

Floor tiles in the main living areas (left and above) mimic the patterns of rugs and are used to denote the different uses of space throughout the home





**ECLECTIC RESTRAINT**  
The dressing area, above, houses one of three antique marble basins. A brass platter, below, from Marrakesh



**M**OST PEOPLE'S HOUSES have walls to delineate their living spaces. Not the Beldi. In this former shoe factory, overlooking St Leonard's Church in Shoreditch, the main living area is marked by different patterns of tiles on the floor. Rhythms shift underfoot – a bordered-off area denotes a “rug”, while a different set of diagonally laid basket weave leads you from the front door to the kitchen.

The way that the owners “feel” their space is typical of how Zoe Chan and Merlin Eayrs, who are architects and designers, operate. The crafted floors take inspiration from riads in Marrakesh, where the couple got married. Traditional British brick motifs lie against the interlocking geometries found in a courtyard house in Suzhou, China, where the couple travelled with their 18-month-old daughter, Max. Casting your eye across the floor is like reading a woven visual map of the family's travels and history.

This emotional connection is emblematic of their work. When they bought their apartment it had previously belonged to a set designer for West End musicals and looked “very much like a stage set”, explains Chan. “We decided to demolish all the internal walls in order to really understand the light and volumes.” For a year the couple lived here with no furniture, blinds or even a kitchen. “There was one bath tub and a bed in the middle of the room and we would rock around the apartment naked,” says Eayrs, laughing. “Zoe was pregnant and I’m sure our neighbours thought we must be squatters.”

Two years later the 3,000sq ft light-filled apartment is a paean to their skill and understated taste. Its wow factor doesn't come from showy statements, but from a calming assortment of shades of green (an antidote to the concrete jungle that lies below) and tactile textures – raw lime plaster on the walls, bespoke carpentry made from cross-sawn →



**CAREFULLY CRAFTED**  
Left: Zoe Chan and Merlin Eayrs with their daughter, Max. Below: furnishings sourced from makers such as The New Craftsmen. Bottom: a 400kg marble basin





limed timber and the considered selection of objects and artwork that come together seamlessly.

Layers of green and blue are a leitmotif, apparent on everything from the handmade mugs from the Well Walk Pottery to the deep green Settle bench by Sue Skeen from the New Craftsmen and the green paint on an artwork by Faye Wei Wei. In the bedrooms Toogood x Once Milano hand-painted quilts with pagan symbols sit next to architectural plants.

It doesn't come as much of a surprise that the couple look like an extension of their home. Nestled in her favourite rope chair, Chan's Robert Clergerie rattan shoes and hand-stitched Egg Trading gardening jacket mirror their habitat. However, lest this all sound a bit too perfect, the pair are champions of craft and the natural shonkiness of the "human touch".

Their favourite pieces include the Zyklus chairs in their sitting area, which have been re-upholstered in Pierre Frey velvet, or a Brodgar chair for "the seamlessness of the carpentry and rushwork, which reflects a real collaboration between the makers", says Eayrs. In terms of their artwork, they love the series of Stephen Wright paintings, which were inspired by the supernatural and are dotted throughout their home. "They are our friendly ghosts," says Chan with a smile.



**PERFECT PICKS**

Above: a bath by the Water Monopoly and handwoven shutters by Chan and Eayrs in collaboration with the weaver Christabel Balfour. Right: a handpainted linen quilt by Toogood x Once Milano. Opposite: the Peggy dining table and chairs by Sue Skeen; blue artwork in ink by Marcus James



Unlike other architects, this husband-and-wife team search the world to handpick their sites and are involved in every aspect of their projects' construction, right down to choosing the Jochen Holz glassware that sits on the kitchen shelf. "Many architects such as Scarpa worked on every element of the home," says Chan. "Architecture was just one of the many things they did...it allows us to work at our own pace and collaborate with specialised craftsmen, fine-tuning the vision like artists or sculptors might."

Travelling in Europe with Max plays a large part in their lives. Indeed, finding objects in brocante markets often provides inspiration for a project, whether that's a new build or restoring palaces in Lisbon that have fallen into disrepair. For the Beldi, the couple found three 400kg marble basins. "Each of them shaped corners of the bedrooms and the pantry," says Eayrs. "It took four of us to carry them, and cost us two chiropractor visits and a few black fingernails to get those up the stairs!"

To the right as you enter are three bedrooms and two bathrooms, but it is the main living area to the left that is where the family spend most of their time. Like many of their design features, the kitchen doesn't look like a kitchen. "So often they can feel a bit sterile," Eayrs explains, "so we designed this one so that it looked as if it was a large dresser." Equally, all is not what it seems in the bathrooms. The traditional Thomas Crapper Thunderbox, complete with its vault-like lid, is built into the wall. It even comes with its own squeak. "That," jokes Eayrs, "took us ages to perfect." [chanandeyrs.com](http://chanandeyrs.com) ●

