



**SIM-PLEX
DESIGN STUDIO**

In an ultradense vertical city like Hong Kong, this local practice makes a small amount of space go a long way.



Architect Patrick Lam spent the first 30 years of his life living in a tenement apartment in Kowloon Walled City, north of Hong Kong. Kowloon was originally a Chinese military fort, which remained autonomously governed through the Opium Wars with Britain in the 19th century. In the 1940s, the high-density enclave was reclaimed by Hong Kong, but it was never fully incorporated under their rule, leading to severe problems with drug crime and squatters. By 1990, Kowloon had a population of 50,000 people living in just 5 acres (20,000 square meters), but it retained elements of a village because the buildings were interconnected. “I had to climb five flights of stairs to get home,” says Lam, “but passing the neighbors each day helped us to get to know one another and created a strong sense of community.”

Growing up in Kowloon, his family of four maximized their home by using space-saving solutions such as bunk beds and folding doors, a personal experience that has influenced his work as an architect. After studying in Hong Kong, he went on to found Sim-Plex Design Studio, which has tackled residential projects in some of the most confined apartments in Hong Kong. Lam is passionate about “enhancing limited spaces without compromising living standards for residents,” and Sim-Plex’s projects focus on innovative solutions that maximize the space available.

Adaptable Architecture

A project that embodies Sim-Plex’s design approach is Pets Playground, a 453-square-foot (42-square-meter) apartment in Yuen Long, Hong Kong, for a young couple with a pet parrot, as well as an elderly parent and her cat. “The pets are considered members of the family, with personalities of their own, and they needed separate spaces,” Lam explains. Multifunctionality and flexibility are paramount in a limited space, especially when different generations are living under the same roof. Lam’s versatile scheme for the apartment includes space-efficient fixtures and fittings, including three sliding frosted glass doors that allow the family to adapt the living areas to form communal and private areas as needed, without blocking the light. The elevated seating platform doubles as a storage box, and the dining table and chairs can be tucked away when they are not in use. Platforms and cubby holes for the cat to explore are integrated into the cabinets and wardrobes, which are made from environmentally friendly melamine-faced boards to protect them from the cat’s claws.

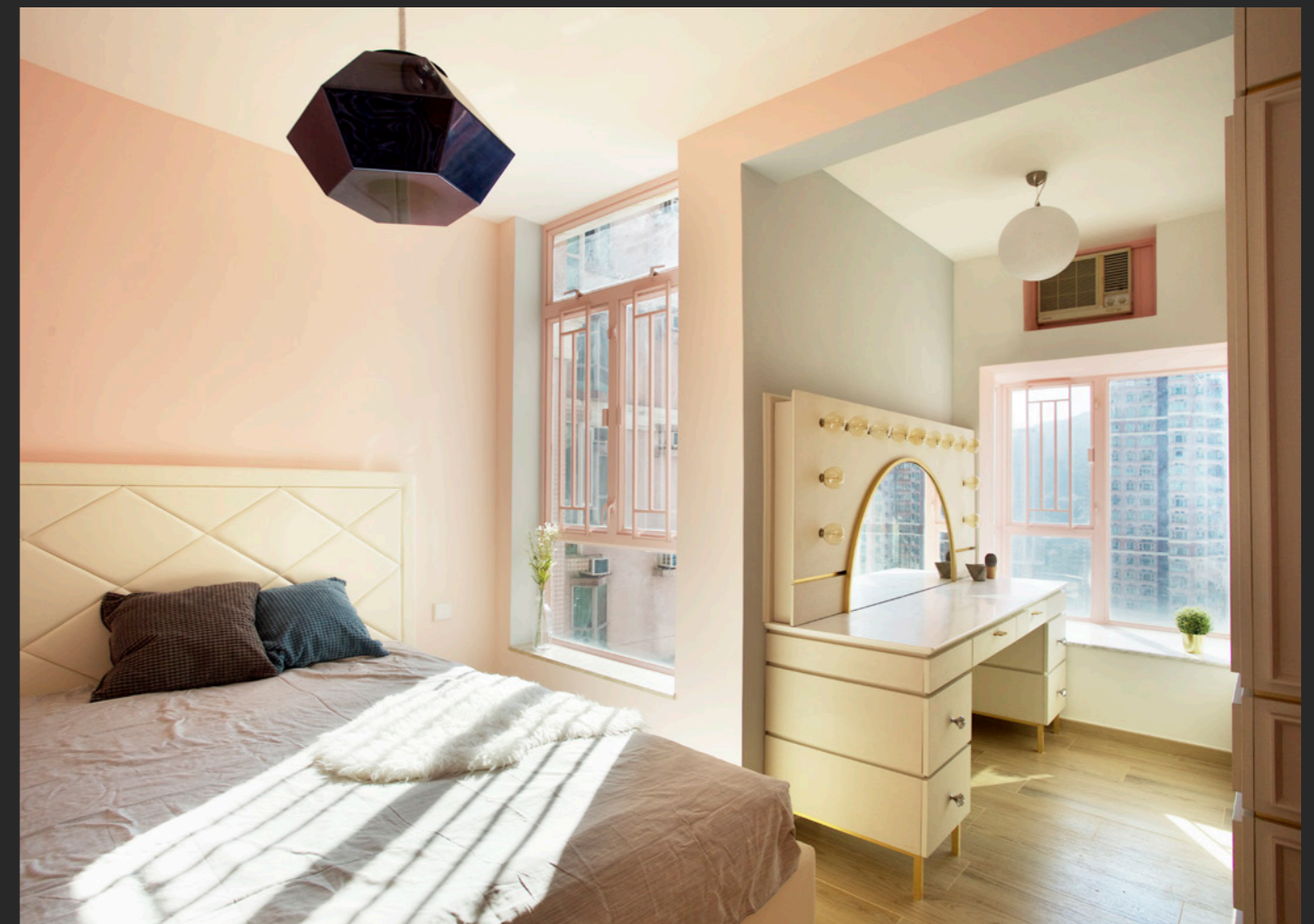
Understanding the clients’ priorities, routines, and how they use their home is a critical component of Sim-Plex’s design process. For *Pretty House in Pink*, Sim-Plex was asked to design an apartment for a young woman to suit her lifestyle and reflect her personality. The 1986 movie *Pretty in Pink* served as a reference for female empowerment (the film touches upon class differences and high-school prom drama). The combination of gold accents and detailing on the furniture and pink-painted window frames was inspired by the lead character’s costumes. The effect is a warm feminine feel with a subtle nod to the 1980s, without overplaying the theme. The apartment’s most striking feature is the dressing table with a semicircular mirror and light bulbs in the walk-in closet area. The walls are painted in muted pastel gray and pink tones, evoking a feeling of calm. →



Smart Zendo
This 527-square-foot (49-square-meter) apartment manages to combine an impressive smart technology system within surroundings that respect the rules of feng-shui for achieving natural harmony in the home.



Bay House (this page)
 Pretty House in Pink
 (opposite)
 Both exemplify the studio's skill at carrying a concept through all aspects of their design, from spatial arrangements and materials to furnishings and color schemes.

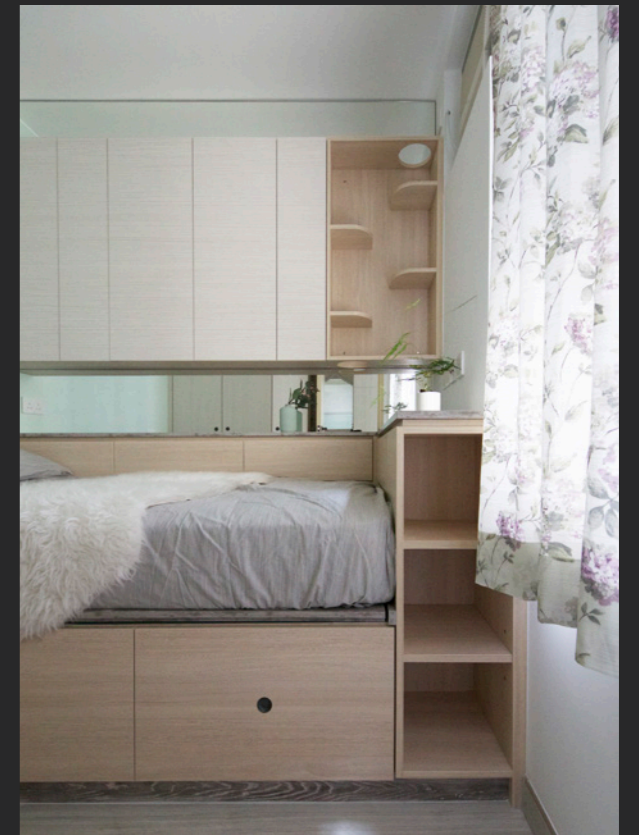


For the Bay House, a young couple approached Lam with the task of renovating their 495-square-foot (46-square-meter) apartment with three vast bay windows overlooking outstanding views of the bay. “They asked for a flexible arrangement of the space without obstructing views of the scenery outside.” Lam treated the windows as “multifunctional picture frames.” Storage cabinets, shelves, and light fittings are integrated with the deep wooden window frames, and the sills can be used for a variety of different purposes, reducing the need for additional furniture. In the main living space, for instance, the dining table rolls out from a wall, and the window sill provides seating in the place of dining chairs. The other two windows are in the master bedroom and home-office space, offering beautiful views and plentiful natural light. “Oversized bay windows were very popular in Hong Kong in the early 2000s,” says Lam, explaining that “due to a quirk in building regulations, windowsills were exempt from floor space restrictions, which prompted developers to build properties with increasingly deep bay windows.” This is no longer the case, but, as Bay House proves, they can be utilized to increase the functionality of small spaces.

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The Smart Home

Smart homes quickly became popular in Hong Kong, but Lam laments that smart technology is not always integrated in a harmonious way. “Although feng shui aesthetics and smart technology seem to be contradictory,” Lam notes, Smart Zendo shows how they can be entirely compatible—“if applied properly.” The renovation project was commissioned by a young couple with a deep affinity for the principles of traditional Chinese living. The modest apartment is also home to the couple’s child and occasionally his grandmother, so it was crucial for the scheme to be versatile. A combination of cutting-edge technology and traditional feng shui principles allows the apartment to adapt to their busy lifestyle with time-saving functions that are built in, such as voice-activated lighting systems and automated air-conditioning, curtain opening, projection screens, and electronic door locks. Bespoke maple wood paneling conceals the workings of the tech, creating a sleek, minimal aesthetic, while the layout and positioning of the furniture adhere to feng shui principles of balance and harmony. The living room has been raised to accommodate storage boxes underneath, as well as a table that lifts up when it is needed. Sliding doors can be closed to separate the kitchen area, and it can comfortably accommodate a variety of activities, from tea ceremonies to movie nights, as well as space for the couple’s son to play. Smart Zendo is an artful combination of old and new, a fitting distinction considering the feng shui principles that defined the space. As Lam explains, “The spirit of Zen is the pursuit of harmony.” ●



Pets Playground
Even with the most unusual briefs, Sim-Plex rises to the challenge of accommodating a diverse range of inhabitants in confined spaces, so that all have a degree of freedom and comfort.