

a walk through *history*

Treating her home as a canvas, an artist gives it her personal touch and style

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Brazilian artist Heloiza Montuori's Nassim Hill apartment expresses her vivacious and colourful personality. She fills it with Chinese antiquities and her own oil paintings. She discovered her passion for collecting antiquities 15 years ago when she and her husband Mario, were posted to Taiwan. In the midst of searching for Qing cabinets and Ming vases, Heloiza also rediscovered something: her passion for creating art. After a 10 year posting in Taiwan, the couple moved to Shanghai for three years and now live in Singapore.

Heloiza, 49, spends most of her time in her painting studio. She sometimes works from eight thirty in the morning straight through seven in the evening or when the sun goes down. The room is filled with large windows and has no curtains to ensure that sunlight is not blocked in any way. A workbench for her paints is the only furniture. The vibrant colours from the paintings she is working on fill the room.

She beams, "I love the large windows in the living room. They allow natural light and air to flow into the home, making it bright and cheery. This inspired me to decorate the apartment, as it's a fabulous piece of canvas to work on. We knew right away that this is where we belong."

Her home is also a canvas of sorts. By applying her artistic eye, she manages to blend the furniture and her Oriental artifacts to good effect. In a corner of the living room is an example of Heloiza's artistic display: a pair of red leather trunks, a Chinese scholar's hat, antique leather pillows and Japanese origami cranes suspended from a branch.

The rented apartment of 400 sqm came with only curtains and lights. "I told the land lady that I wanted to make some changes, so I repainted the walls white, changed the curtains to white roller blinds, took away the chandeliers and fixed yellow spot lights to create a warm and homely feel."



Heloiza Montuori



Entering Heloiza's living and dining area is like taking a lesson in Chinese history. Practically a museum of ancient relics, it houses a large collection of antique pottery ranging from the Han to the Ming dynasties. Her oldest collection, green vases from the Han dynasty, between 25 AD to 220 AD. "Though known as green vases, some are actually light brown and others are unglazed. They come in the form of pots, bowls and jars." Other prominent pieces include a Tang dynasty terracotta horse.

Her marble flooring is also complemented by pieces of antique Tibetan rugs, which she bought from collectors in China and antique shops Singapore. Some of them have been woven to form tiger stripes, reflecting the powerful natural force represented by the animal; while others have designs of the dragon, believed to be the eastern Mother Nature — a benevolent and auspicious character.

Not to be missed by anyone who walks through the main door is Heloiza's favourite art piece — an abstract painting "sunset". It was done in 1999, when she and her husband were still staying in Taiwan. "This is my most memorable piece of artwork because it's my first attempt painting on such a large canvas, 1.9m by 1.5m. It took me almost a year to finish it."

Artifacts are displayed all over the home. Yet the apartment does not look over-crowded; thanks to its three-metre high ceiling and white walls. "I love its high ceiling. It makes my apartment look bigger and allows me to hang my large oil paintings. Also, I painted my walls white so that they will provide a neutral backdrop and showcase the colours of my canvases and my Oriental artifacts, which are mostly brown. The white walls also give the illusion of a spacious and clean home," explains Heloiza.

With a home this big, she can hold cocktail parties of a hundred guests. "I very much enjoy entertaining at home. Our wenge wood dining table seats up to twelve people and looks beyond the balcony into the greenery. Sometimes I can even spot colourful birds and squirrels." But what draws the greatest attention is the large oil painting of nine kois hung on the wall behind the dining table. It acts as a perfect backdrop. "Many of my visitors have commented that the fish look so alive. The number of the fish is also very auspicious because nine represents longevity."

Breaking away from the rich colours of the home is her monochromatic bedroom. The walls, wardrobes, and bed covers are all in off white and grey. Black and white photographs of family and friends are placed into silver frames and mounted onto the walls.

"When I was living in Shanghai, I did a series of paintings using black, white and grey. I decided to put them all in one place and create a different feel in my bedroom." A painting of Aspen trees hangs above their king-size bed and enhances the peace and tranquility of the restful sanctuary. More black and white photographs of the Heloiza, Mario and their two daughters are also displayed on the bedside table. Natalia, 23, is a graduate from Yale University and currently works in a Public Relations agency in Beijing. While Mariel, 20, is a second year undergraduate at Tufts University in Boston.

Among all the exquisite antiques she owns, three vases that her daughters made in high school are closest to Heloiza's heart. Displayed in the living room, not far from the ancient Han pots, they are contemporary in design. Two of them are in shades of brown and one is in orange. Heloiza says, "My daughters made them for me and they're perfect in my eyes. They're my most prized possessions." **hc**