



T R È S G R E Y

This Paris-inspired flat in Mid-Levels is decidedly chic sans colour

This spread: Interior designer Peggy Bels paired this sofa from Organic Modernism with a rug sourced from Pakistan, which she dyed in Hong Kong

The blue Art Lavie-designed Gradient vase and 24-carat gold-coated Canfino candleholders by Jaime Hayón for Bosa are both from Lane Crawford

Unless you're the dark and brooding type, shades of grey probably wouldn't be the colour palette you'd point your interior designer toward when renovating your home. Most want light, bright and airy – the aesthetic ruling today's concept of "clean" design.

Step into this minimalist trove in Mid-Levels, however, and you might change your mind. Black metal was used to clad doors, stairs and cabinets. The living room carpet – sourced from Pakistan – was dyed in shadowy shades by the designer herself.

"I like to use these inky colours," says Parisian interior designer Peggy Bels, who has been reviving properties in Hong Kong, Thailand and Bali since 2008. "Dark backgrounds allow light colours to pop and create more contrast and deepness. Rough textures also give character to a space."



This page: Wooden touches can be seen in the sculptural Norman Cherner dining chairs and matching dining table (Lane Crawford); A centrepiece sofa from Organic Modernism

Opposite page: Custom-made black metal cabinetry against a sleek marble countertop; A wall of frames at the study



Despite Bels' penchant for deep hues, the apartment maintains its luminosity and spaciousness thanks to its "warm grey" palette – Bels' signature colour scheme – paired with bright whites. Graphic elements with splashes of red can be found in the artworks adorning the "milky" walls, adding dimension to the space.

"I mix water into the cement finish to get that effect," says Bels. "When you do that, you get a milky colour that feels cosy and warm." She also balances out the dark wood (as seen in the dining table) with soft fabrics and white marble (seen in the kitchen counter), bringing her contemporary theme full-circle.

The French couple that formerly occupied this 2,800sq.ft flat – it has since been resold – asked Bels to renovate their living and dining areas. They wanted something modern and markedly different from the last time it was remodelled a decade ago. The earlier renovation left the Chinese floor and original partitioned layout intact, but these elements clashed with the overarching theme, so they had to go.

"Dark backgrounds allow light colours to pop, creating contrast. Rough textures also give character to a space"

First, Bels put in grey oak floors and tore down the walls between the kitchen and living spaces to create an open layout plan. However, structural beams between the entrance, living room and kitchen were obstacles in the most literal sense. "We had to keep them there, but I covered them with the same cement finish to make them interesting," she says. "The effect is seamless – that's the key to keeping that open sensation."

The fluidity is Bels' favourite part of the flat. The kitchen flows into the dining and living rooms, finally leading out onto a 400sq.ft balcony. Expansive views of the sea and mountains give one the soaring sensation of being on top of Hong Kong.

Leaving the communal area, we now walk down a narrow hallway to the private quarters. Round mirrors and large rectangular frames add personalised touches without over-cluttering the room. Indeed, there isn't one inch of space that feels over- or under-decorated.

Light pours into the master bedroom, a plush sanctuary with verdant views. Bels gave the space some French flair, installing a map of the Paris metro above the headboard.

However, trendsetters and shopaholics would probably be more impressed with the floor-to-ceiling closets in the dressing room. The wardrobes, which line both sides of the lavishly carpeted space, would certainly not seem out of place in fictional fashionista Carrie Bradshaw's apartment.

The renovation took six months to complete and also introduced a new bedroom for the couple's young daughter. With grey and faded pink forming a perfect union, it was only fitting that the pastel-coloured nursery be the one standout space in the flat.

The tour ends at the TV room-cum-study, furnished with a stingray leather writing desk and vintage leather loveseat. The mounted flatscreen is camouflaged by a charming assortment of picture frames covering the white wall – an oval portrait here, an overexposed Eiffel Tower there.



Text: Julienne C. Raboca Photos: Eugene Chan

While Bels' approach is a far cry from the warm, earthy tones that are often utilised to create a homey glow, hers is a cooler comfort that relies on subtlety and simplicity. Her idea of home is completely free of clutter, with texture and light being harnessed to round the edges.

If you like what you see, then you might find her advice useful: "Let light circulate; use a combination of floor lamps, table lamps and down lights suspended from a dropped ceiling. Use a

Opposite page: The view from the walk-out terrace; A cosy nursery

This page: A brass Tom Dixon lamp stands out in matte metallic; Hallway decorations



The floor-to-ceiling wardrobes, which line both sides of the dressing room, would not seem out of place in Carrie Bradshaw's flat

directional recessed spotlight to bounce reflected light off walls in order to open up the space.

"Put all these lights on dimmer switches to allow for flexibility, depending on the time of day, event or mood. Lighting fixtures are essential in adding character; don't overfill the space with too many accessories or furniture."

Boiled down to its essence, Bels' philosophy is not far off from another one of her compatriots: Coco Chanel. As the iconic designer wisely once said, "Luxury must be comfortable; otherwise it is not luxury." It's advice that designers of all trades would be better off heeding. ■