

Home on Adam Drive

When a fashion maven turned furniture designer adds her style to an iconic black-and-white, magic happens.

BY MELINDA MURPHY
PHOTOGRAPHY LAURA BELL

“As I see it, black-and-white houses are the soul of Singapore and living in one is a real privilege,” says CLAIRE WARREN. “For us, it’s been a highlight of our eleven years living here”.

Truth is, Claire’s husband Digby was a bit obsessed with the idea of living in a black-and-white, plus the family was sick of moving and always chasing a bigger house. They’d already lived in a condo in Holland Village and a duplex on Kheam Hock and they were hungering for a big garden. Boy, did they get it.

With three bedrooms and one and a half bathrooms, the house isn’t all that large, but the yard is simply massive, which means the couple’s three children – Mia (10), Sebastian (8) and Lucian (3) – can run around outside from the moment they walk in the door after school. Battling screen time isn’t a problem in the Warren house. Their weeknights are all about freedom and fresh air.





A strong community

“What’s great about Adam Drive is the community,” says Claire. “A lot of the families on the street have kids and many are even in the same school. The children get an element of independence because they can roam around together and have instant playdates. We tend to either have no children here or six or more children all at one time, as they roam between the houses swimming, jumping on the trampoline, rollerblading, riding their bikes and walking the dogs. For us, it feels like you’re living in a little village and it’s fabulous to be able to rely on your neighbours.

“Halloween on the Drive is always lots of fun, too, and there are plenty of barbecues between the neighbours. We love our location because we are set back off the road so we do have quite a bit of privacy.”

“In the end, the house is about our lifestyle as much as anything else”

Fixing it up

The Warrens have made the most of their yard, really taking the term “outdoor living” to heart. The pool is just a few steps from the front door, so they redid and expanded the decking, adding an outdoor dining area for entertaining. They also added overhead fans to make the outdoor sitting area a usable extension of their indoor living room. The indoor dining space was repurposed into an office. And – like with many black-and-whites – they had to install all the blinds and curtains themselves, as well as the air-conditioning.

“We don’t turn the air-cons on except at night. Because we’re on a hill, we get a nice breeze. When the doors are open, we have to be mindful of all the wildlife,” laughs Claire.



Wildlife indeed!

Adam Drive has lots of monkeys. Lots. In fact, Claire’s husband once had a steak thawing on the kitchen counter and a monkey came in and stole it, leaving only the Tupperware container behind. What smarties! Wild boars, who are losing more and more of their natural habitat (the Singapore Island Country Club’s golf course backs up to their land), wander into the yard looking for food, and recently attacked their dog, Biscuit. On the upside, there are beautiful oriole birds and, not long ago, they had a nest of three kingfisher babies. They really are living in a jungle.

“I was born and brought up in London, but my Indian parents are expats and they’ve done jungle living in Sarawak, Malaysia,” explains Claire. “And my husband grew up in Jakarta for 25 years, lived in Banda Aceh and has been camping in the jungle. So it wasn’t a massive leap for either one of us. It’s not like we stepped off the streets of London into a completely foreign world.”

The area of Adam Drive has a remarkable history, too, as a former Second World War headquarters and camp. It was originally used by British troops, before being taken over by the Japanese military and used as a camp for prisoners of war, primarily women and children. (You can find more about the area’s history on our website, expatliving.sg.)





the TV taking over the room) and also a dining area. With careful space planning and layouts, and creating clearly defined zones with furniture and textiles (aka rugs!), we were able to turn our L-shape room into a multifunctional zone. We have separation and definition, but also continuity throughout the room."

The home is dotted with furniture items from The Grey House, such as some iconic leather woven chairs; but the couple also have bits and bobs from across the globe. There are temple weavings from Indonesia, and traditional English button-back chairs passed down from Claire's mum, mixed with sleek marble table-tops. A special piece of art was a gift from all her friends for her 40th birthday. And there's a round bespoke table that gets used for indoor dining. Claire loves round tables as you can use them in different ways; they also take up less room while still being able to fit lots of people. And, while the home has been fun to decorate with her style, living in a black-and-white for them is more than just about being in a house rather than a condo.

"In the end, the house is about our lifestyle as much as anything else. Our kids are growing up free and outside. It simply doesn't get better than that."



Making a house a home

Claire's background is in fashion, having worked for the likes of Chanel and Club 21. Now, she's the owner of The Grey House, an interior lifestyle brand that has a focus on rugs and furniture, much of it with the flexibility to customise to the client. She applies her brand philosophy to her own home with beautiful results.

"The way I look at it, expats move all the time. It's so much easier if you have a neutral canvas to start with as it gives you more adaptability and versatility. I believe in buying good-quality products that give you the longevity you want."

Claire is all about textures and fabrics, and creating the feel of a place. She has also commissioned a few bespoke pieces for their home. Her husband Digby, on the other hand, likes to arrange the furniture and figure out the best layout. "He has very good spatial awareness," Claire explains. "He's constantly moving furniture around and rearranging things; it's as though we get a new home all the time. But it has been an essential part of living in our black-and-white. With only three bedrooms, we have had to be creative in how we used the space as we needed to maximise the living area to be a place to relax, a TV area (without





Clairé's Recommendations

shoplottielifestyle.com ("gorgeous, new Singapore-based website by blogger Charlie Cameron, showcasing a stunning curation of furniture and homeware")

Cuckoo Little Lifestyle ("for gorgeous children's furniture and accessories")
cuckoolittlelifestyle.com

Merci Marcel ("quirky gifts in Palais Renaissance")

Soul & Tables ("quality and stylish furniture")
soulandtables.com.sg

Bode ("the best selection of fabrics and cushions")
bode.com.sg

Soho Home ("they don't deliver everything internationally but they have beautiful homeware")
sohohome.com

Jimmy Textiles ("Noel helped me make all the roman blinds without breaking the bank!")
jimmytextiles.com

Parisilk ("for all your white goods and air-cons")
parisilk.com

Home Fashions, Wendy ("for making new or recovering old lampshades")

Pinterest ("for loads of inspiration")

The Grey House ("furniture, rugs and homewares, and we work with clients to customise the perfect pieces for their homes")
thegreyhouseonline.com