



# A Renovation Romance

BY MELINDA MURPHY



Talk about a passion project! This stunning home makeover carried out by a pair of newlyweds is nothing short of a love letter to one another.

**I**t's a love story really, this place at Mimosa Park. Two newlyweds, LISA OAKE and her husband SANJAY MIRCHANDANI, share a passion for home makeovers and their newly renovated apartment is their unexpected masterpiece.

Unexpected because they live in Mimosa Park. Built in 1976, it's one of the oldest condos in Singapore. So, what lies behind the front door seems a bit incongruous with what you might expect as you walk through the condo parking lot. In fact, the combination of the real stone walls and the custom-built kitchen feels more like something you'd find back in Lisa's home country of Canada – not Seletar.

"Google was our architect," the couple laughs. Lisa adds, "We knew we wanted a cosy and rustic feel, so we both spent a lot of time online, researching what we liked. We're so lucky that we have exactly the same taste – we agreed on absolutely everything."

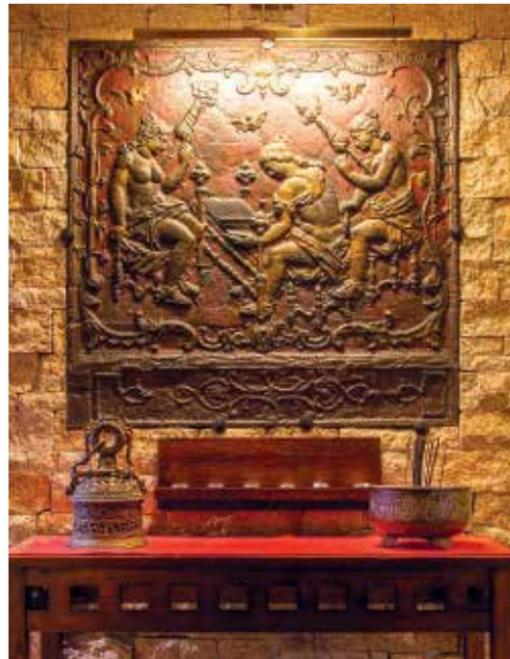


### The stone wall

Even though Sanjay had renovated another home previously, sourcing things in Singapore was no easy task. For starters, there's the impressive stone wall that sets the tone for the entire home. "We went to eight different places to look at walls, but nothing was quite like the one we wanted," explains Sanjay. "We finally found a gigantic granite boulder at a place called Hot Spring Stone. They used this big burner and a stone-cutting machine and started chiselling it off for us. The pieces had to be thin so they would go on the wall properly. I think the guy thought we were a little crazy," says Sanjay, with a twinkle in his eye. His love for this project is as apparent as Lisa's.

They hired two contractors to execute the renovation and bring their designs to life. Richard Pang from Square Room Interior Design oversaw most of the work, including the installation of the stone wall. Lisa wanted an arch and she also wanted every stone to have a slightly different shape. That meant the artisan who installed the wall had to further re-cut and shape each piece by hand before cementing it into place.

"If all the stones are too uniform, it loses that cosy feel and doesn't look authentic," Lisa explains. "We also wanted to extend the wall out to the balcony to make the space feel larger. We were lucky that the condo management let us do it. The arch was the trickiest bit, by far."



### The kitchen

The second contractor, Calsia Lee from Mu Dian, focused on the navy blue kitchen and master bedroom closet. An open layout was important to Lisa and Sanjay, so they hired an engineer to confirm they could move the kitchen from its original location, taking out both a bathroom and bedroom to make it happen. Moving the pipes and drainage was a difficult task, but the result was worth it: a beautiful, open-concept kitchen.

"Lisa is a fantastic cook," beams Sanjay. "I wanted her to have the kitchen of her dreams so we designed every detail, including the butler's pantry and wine shelves. We found this giant slab of South American suar wood in Mandai and we knew we wanted to use it for the island countertop. Calsia did an amazing job and custom-built the island specifically to fit that piece of wood."

Figuring out where the island should go was trickier. "We originally wanted it to run parallel to the cooker, but realised it wouldn't fit. So, we put tape on the floor and kept rearranging it until we had just the right placement. We didn't want people to keep bumping into each other in the kitchen. It had to feel spacious."

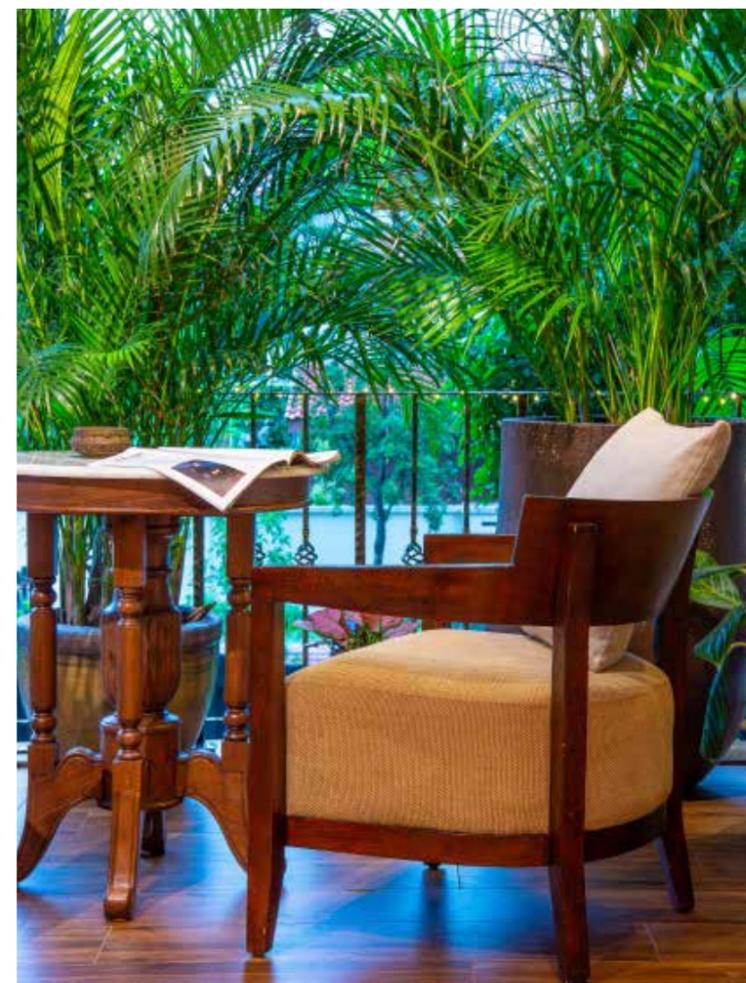


Thanks to an incredibly powerful vent with a booster installed above the stove, the family can cook favourites such as sausage and roasted red pepper pasta or lamb chops with fresh rosemary, cumin and chilli without food smells permeating the living room furniture.

### Their favourite touches

A lot of the details that make the kitchen – and the rest of the home – truly special were shipped from overseas. Sanjay, a captain with Singapore Airlines, had the 42-inch farmhouse copper sink custom-designed in India.

The 300-year-old firebacks – cast-iron pictures that were once used to retain heat at the backs of fireplaces – were imported from France. They were made by carving scenes into wood, with the planks then placed into sand, and molten metal poured on top. You can tell a true



antique fireback because you can still see the lines where the boards would have joined up.

"I was searching for backsplash ideas because I wanted something a little different. I saw a photo of a fireback being used as a backsplash and fell in love with the idea," says Lisa. "We located two perfect pieces at a warehouse in Paris. As it happened, Sanjay was flying to Paris the very next day."

Sanjay picks up the story: "It turns out the antique dealer was only a half-hour walk from my hotel. I bought them both and then had to figure out how to get them back to Singapore. They're not only heavy, but also very old. TNT agreed to ship them for us. The package total weight was 213kg."

It took five men to lift and hold the firebacks to install them. One was placed behind the stove and the other at the entrance to the front door. The fireback behind the stove is flanked by ceramic tiles that closely resemble old tin tiles. The difference is the ceramic is easy to clean, as is the fireback, which only needs to be wiped down and occasionally oiled.

The floors throughout the apartment are also ceramic, a tile that looks like hardwood. "I love the look of hardwood," explains Lisa, "but wood scratches easily and termites can be a problem in Singapore. The ceramic is sturdy enough for an apartment full of teenagers and pets." She's referring to Logan, 16, a student at the Singapore American School, Evan, 19, who's at Western University in London, Ontario, and the couple's Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and two rescue cats.

### The extras

Some things, such as crown moulding, were easy to find in Singapore, whereas the thick baseboards they preferred were not available here and had to be imported from Belgium.

"We renovated every inch of this 2,154-square-foot apartment," Sanjay laughs. There are now three bedrooms, an office and a nice space for Lisa's helper Flora who's been with her for almost 20 years. Sanjay even made sure that Lisa, the former co-host of CNBC's Squawk Box and now CEO of Oake Media, had a custom-built makeup table in the bedroom. They also added shortened twelve-inch grills to each window ledge to keep their beautiful, large plants from sliding off.

As for furnishings, some – such as the sofas from Taylor B – are new, but a lot of things came from their two lives prior to their marriage. They melded together perfectly, just like the couple themselves.

"We've had so much fun doing this project together," said Lisa. "It consumed the six months that it took us to do it, but we loved every minute. We're ready for the next one!"



## Recommendations

Master contractor  
Richard Pang, Square Room  
Interior Design  
[squareroomid.com](http://squareroomid.com)

Kitchen/closet contractor  
Calsia Lee, Mu Dian Pte Ltd  
[mudian.com.sg](http://mudian.com.sg)

Stone supplier  
Mr Monjurul & Mr Ah San  
Hot Spring Stone Private  
Limited  
[hotspringstone.com](http://hotspringstone.com)

Wooden island supplier  
Anthony Xu, Wood Capitol  
[woodcapitol.com](http://woodcapitol.com)

Brass supplier in India  
Mr Kamlesh Mehta, Shree  
Charuba Stores  
+91 93244 06167

Plants  
Ji Mei Flower | [jm.com.sg](http://jm.com.sg)

Lisa's media training company  
Oake Media | [oakemedia.com](http://oakemedia.com)

