

# A HAPPY PLACE

BY KATE FARR PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHELLE PROCTOR

The neutral palette of this Happy Valley apartment creates a perfect backdrop for the Batt family's growing art collection.



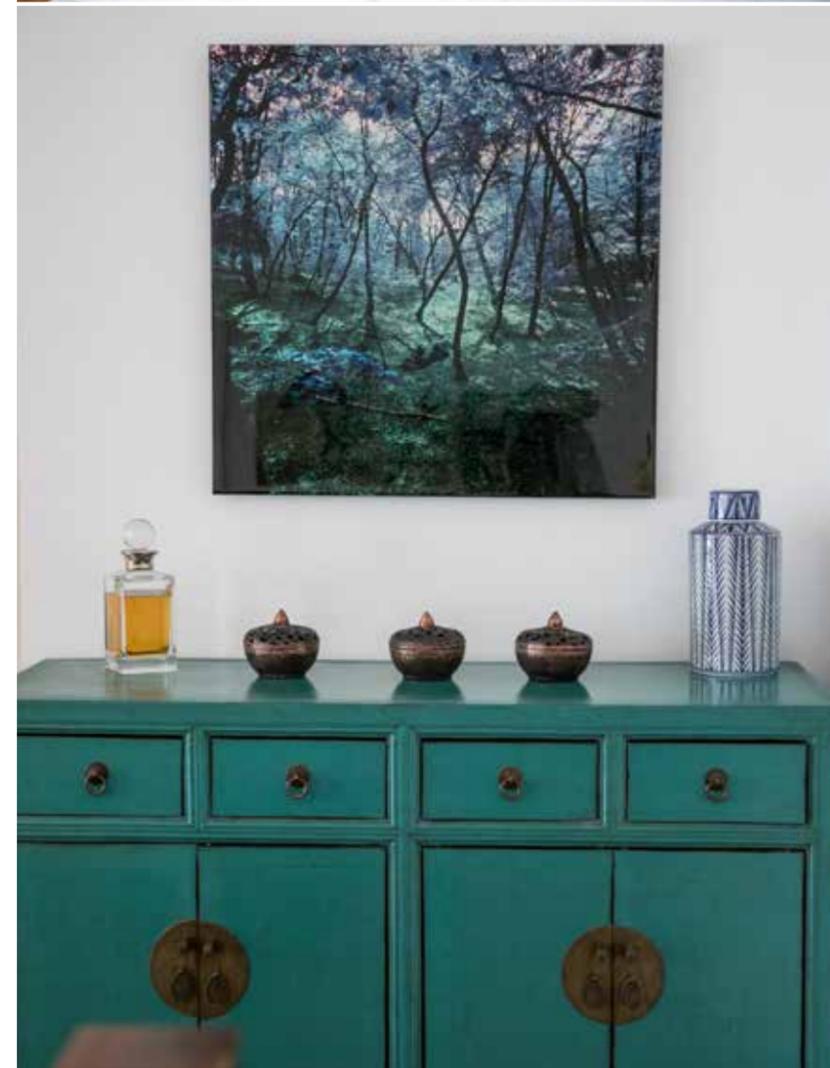
Chatting to MAWGAN BATT, founder of marketing and communications agency **Boutique Communications**, you immediately get the sense that she is, above all else, a pragmatist at heart.

The busy mum of two lives in the heart of Happy Valley with husband Tom, who works in banking, sons Caleb (9) and Isaac (6), and family dog Wilbur. And while the family loves the Valley's village vibe, Mawgan is refreshingly frank about its limitations. "There are frustrations with life here, as there are everywhere! Living amongst so many people in such a small space brings challenges, none more so than the compromise on living space."

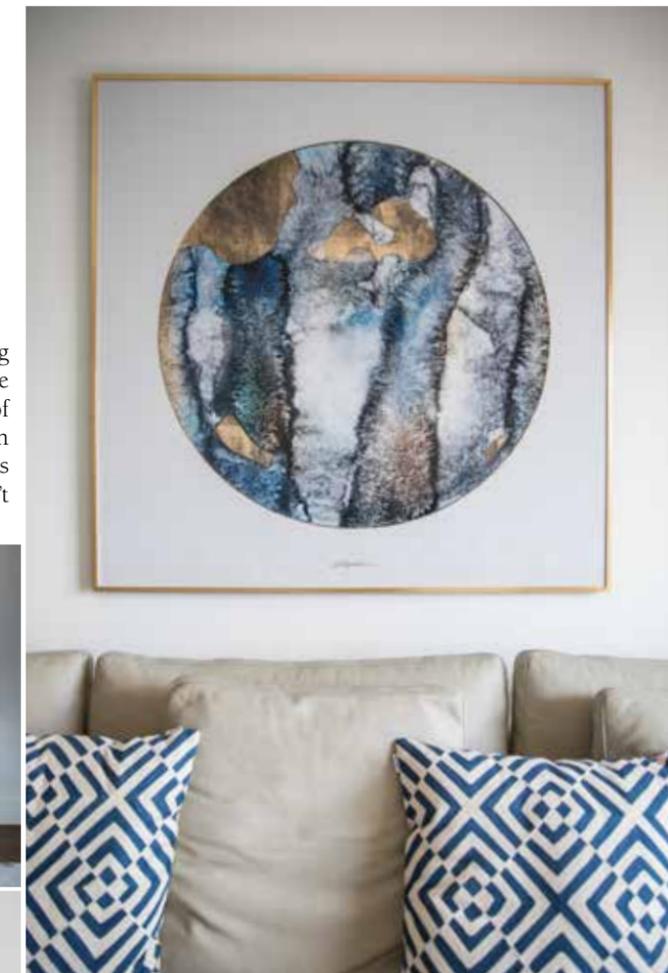
She adds that the major downside to life in Happy Valley is transport. "It's quite poorly connected to the rest of Hong Kong, with limited public transport – and the congestion can be a nightmare." Her solution? Regular tram rides, which, while time-consuming, offer the perfect opportunity for people-watching.

For all the challenges of city living, the family have allocated the space in their 1,300-square-foot apartment wisely, fitting in three bedrooms, one of which doubles as Mawgan's home office, along with that rarest of Hong Kong commodities – a walk-in wardrobe, which is tamed with regular decluttering. The children's storage needs are met by good old IKEA – "their storage solutions for small spaces are ideal for HK apartments" – paired with good-quality bunk beds by Okooko in Horizon Plaza, which are durable enough to withstand life with active kids.

Speaking of furniture, Mawgan explains that longevity is key to the retail choices they've made. "We invested in some great furniture when we bought our first apartment in London in 2004, and we still have the same dining table, bed, chest of drawers and bedside tables; we don't believe in throwing things away for the sake of it, and we try to keep things for as long as they're useful." Still, she doesn't shy away from adding carefully considered pieces to the home where necessary – the L-shaped sofa finished in soft grey leather, for example, was custom-made in Shenzhen to free up space in their living room.



While what Mawgan accurately describes as "the typical Hong Kong off-white walls" might discourage some renters, the Batt family have taken the opportunity to use this as a backdrop to their collection of artwork acquired over the years during their many travels. Mawgan explains: "We've collected quite a few pieces in the last ten years that have featured on our walls in many different homes. We aren't



‘collectors’ in the true sense of the word, but luckily Tom and I share similar tastes.”

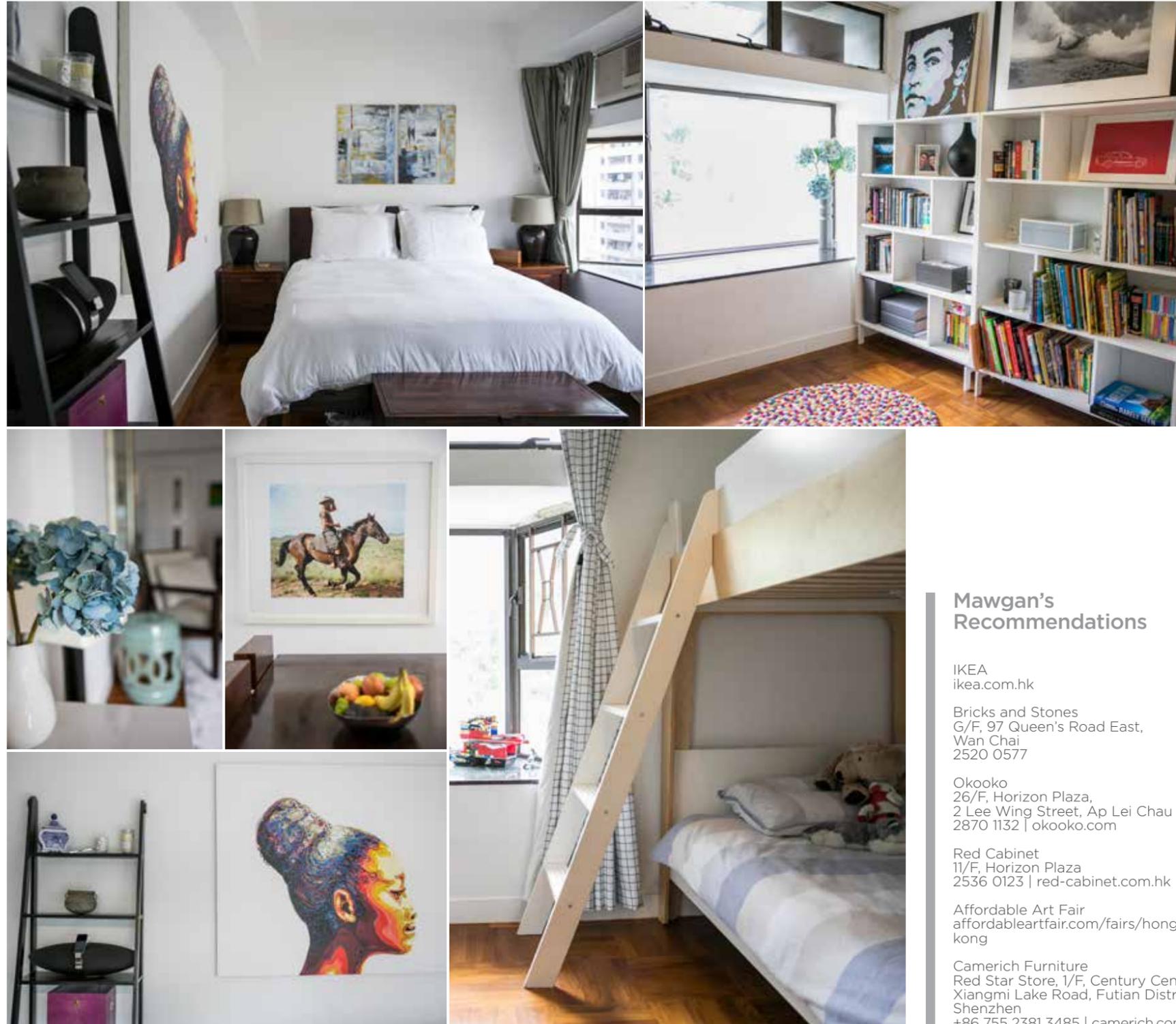
One striking example, and one of the most meaningful pieces for keen rider Mawgan, is David Chancellor’s *Koroo Horseman* photograph, “We saw it in a gallery in Cape Town on our honeymoon in 2009 and I loved it instantly. Everything about the picture makes me happy; from the bridle held together by bits of string, to the slight smile on the rider’s face as he sits casually holding on to his hat. We didn’t buy it at the time, but Tom managed to track it down over a year later and had it shipped to the UK and framed for my 30th birthday. Since then, it’s been pride of place in every home we’ve had.”

A more recent purchase saw the Batts invest in two pieces by US-based artist Albert Delamour. “The first is titled *Wonderland*, and we picked it up at the Affordable Art Fair here in 2014. It was the most expensive piece we’d ever bought, and still is, but we love it.” The couple were so smitten with the photograph on lacquered tile accented with silver leaf that they ended up buying a companion piece. “We were fortunate to have a long chat with the gallery owner who called us after the fair to let us know about another piece by the same artist. She brought it for us to see, and we fell in love with it too! It’s a similar style to *Wonderland*, but features a photograph of bamboo on a lacquered tile with gold leaf. The reflective nature is ideal in a small room.”

Reflective materials are a key theme throughout Mawgan’s home, with the recent acquisition of a circular print by Chinese photographer Zhang Wei continuing the motif. “It has a reflective surface that bounces light around the living room. It’s also very striking – we’ve received a lot of compliments on it.”

Another key piece is the less pricey but equally well-loved hand-painted Buddha. “We found this in a gallery in Siem Reap in 2003 when we were poor backpackers and I remember the protracted discussion about whether we should buy it as it was around US\$100, but I’m so glad that we did! We had it properly mounted and framed when we got back to London, and it’s always featured on our walls.”

Even Mawgan’s office plays host to original artwork, along with the ultimate pragmatist’s office essential – a wine fridge! And despite the limitations of living in a Hong Kong rental, Mawgan continues to embrace the benefits of city living in her trademark pragmatic style, creating a cosy, welcoming home that fits her family. *α*



### Mawgan's Recommendations

IKEA  
ikea.com.hk

Bricks and Stones  
G/F, 97 Queen's Road East,  
Wan Chai  
2520 0577

Okooko  
26/F, Horizon Plaza,  
2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau  
2870 1132 | okooko.com

Red Cabinet  
11/F, Horizon Plaza  
2536 0123 | red-cabinet.com.hk

Affordable Art Fair  
affordableartfair.com/fairs/hong-kong

Camerich Furniture  
Red Star Store, 1/F, Century Centre,  
Xiangmi Lake Road, Futian District,  
Shenzhen  
+86 755 2381 3485 | camerich.com



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