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PEACEFUL AERIE

Creative meeting of minds results in harmonious, minimalist condo

BY LAUREL WELLMAN • PHOTOGRAPHY: JANIS NICOLAY



THERE'S ONE THING on which homeowner Joan Lew and designer Anna Dhillon do not agree. "She was really easy to work with," says Dhillon. "Well, I don't know," says Joan. "I think it was the other way round."

Dhillon's design for the open-plan living room and dining room of Joan's 2,226-square-foot harbour-front condominium in the Residences At Fairmont Pacific Rim reflects their meeting of minds. "I said: 'I want minimal. I want classic,'"

says Joan, whose previous home in Vancouver's Kerrisdale neighbourhood was more traditional.

Joan, who'd bought the condo from a plan and moved in just after the hoopla of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics had left Jack Poole Plaza many storeys below, consulted with Dhillon for more than a year as the design progressed.

Backing onto the Italian Boffi kitchen that came with the condominium, the space is a serene and, yes, minimal aerie.

Dhillon created two seating areas: an informal seating nook close to the kitchen, and a formal living room area overlooking the harbour. The two are divided by a grand piano, a piece Joan brought with her from her former home, while closer to the entrance hall is the dining area, centered on a Le Corbusier LC6 table. 

(Opposite) An artful blend of lithe-legged Mid-century Modern classics and contemporary pieces ensures sightlines to the spectacular view over Coal Harbour remain unimpeded. The sofa is by San Francisco-based designer Ted Boerner. (Below) Dhillon chose painted graphite for the legs of the Zanotta Lia chairs to create a soft look against the condominium's dark floors. The Le Corbusier LC6 dining table also floats on its black enameled steel base. The B&B Italia console, a svelte stand-in for a bulkier sideboard, provides a pop of color with its orange back panels.



Unity is assured through the subtle palette of pearlescent greys, sparingly accented with pops of bright orange, a colour proposed by Dhillon long before Pantone declared it colour of the year, and heartily approved by Joan. “I said, ‘I love orange! I’ll go with it,’” she says.

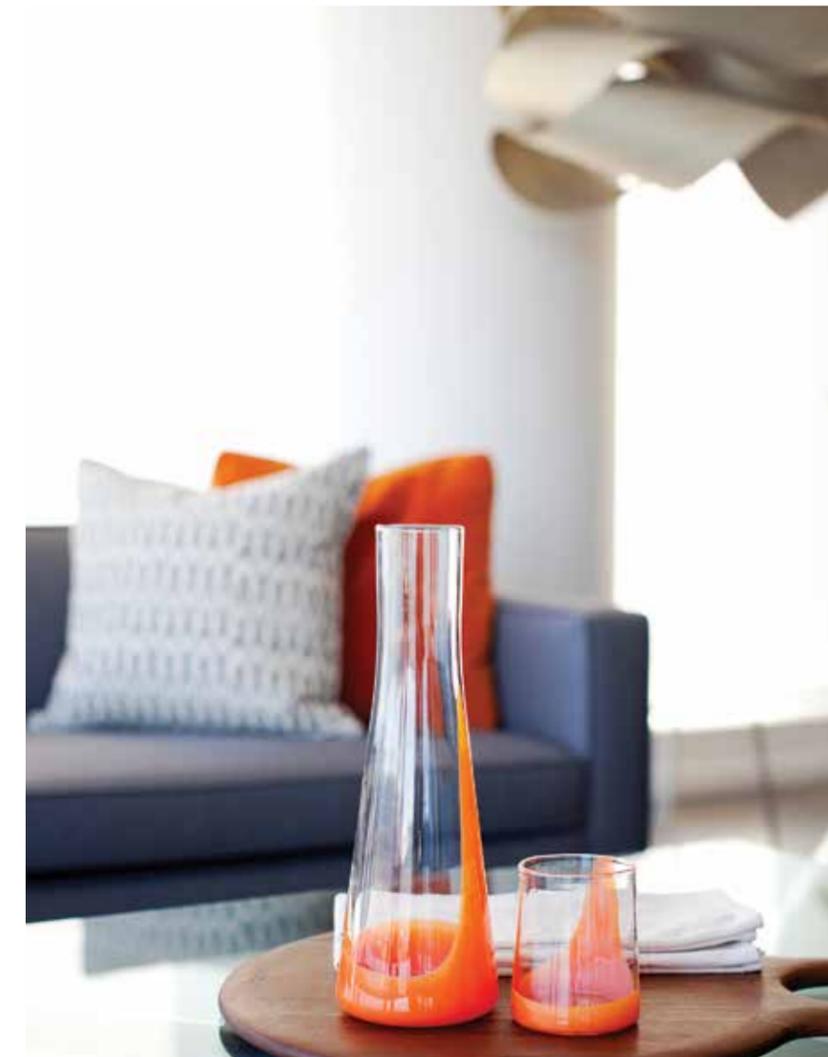
The building, designed by James K.M. Cheng, widely regarded as the city’s leading modernist architect and responsible for many of the slim, glass curtain-walled residential

towers that define the style known internationally as Vancouverism, is among the tallest on the harbour front. Joan has a view that stretches from the fir tops of Stanley Park, across the harbour to the North Shore Mountains, and southeast to the dome of BC Place Stadium. It created a challenge for Dhillon. “How do we make sure the outside doesn’t overwhelm the inside and vice versa?” Dhillon says.

Her elegant solution was partially inspired by the Case Study Houses, an influential series of houses constructed in southern California between 1948 and 1966 that allowed a roster of architects, including Richard Neutra and Charles and Ray Eames, to explore ambitious new ideas about housing in the post-war era. In addition to originating a West Coast aesthetic that relies on minimal division between indoors and outdoors, the glass-walled dwellings

were often spectacularly perched on Los Angeles hillsides. The parallels with the look of Joan’s condominium certainly weren’t lost on Parsons School of Design-trained Dhillon, who noted, “You feel like you’re on a ledge looking out over the Hollywood Hills.”

Anchored by a Bensen Neo sectional sofa from Vancouver designer Niels Bendtsen, the informal seating area enjoys a southeastern view across the downtown core. The nesting tables are from Spanish design house STUA.





Shots of orange add a fillip of whimsy to the understated elegance of the otherwise monochromatic design. A pair of Platner chairs in graphite velvet join a Florence Knoll bench in the formal seating area. The pure silk rug is by Daniel Hechter for Toulemonde Bochart. (Opposite, left) Above a simple glass console in the hallway, the Fiam Italia mirror's curved glass edges hint at the condominium's minimal yet subtly playful aesthetic.

Her design relies on airy Mid-century Modern classics, such as the formal seating area's chrome-based Platner chairs, artfully mixed with such contemporary pieces as the Bocci chandelier over the dining room table, by Vancouver designer Omer Arbel. Chosen with an eye to keeping sightlines open, the fixture is also a sparkling echo of that Mid-century Modern favourite, the mobile.

But Dhillon, who worked at New York's Skidmore, Owings and Merrill before launching her

own firm in Vancouver, wanted to avoid a too-literal interpretation of the look. "I didn't want the space to be all Mid-century Modern," she says. Instead, she sourced contemporary pieces, including a stunning abstract silk rug from French manufacturer Toulemonde Bochart, which Dhillon describes as "a real find;" its ripple-like pattern recalls the water outside. "I was thinking about the Upper East Side, really drawing from that New York refined, sophisticated look," she says.

Her design also offers display space for a collection of pieces acquired by Joan that includes Inuit carvings, an ornate incense burner and a jade bear by highly collectible B.C. sculptor David Wong. Some fill a console selected by Dhillon for its slim profile, a thoughtful choice in the dining room. "A lot of traditional buffets are a lot deeper," Dhillon says. 

(Below) At the breakfast bar, black leather-upholstered Kristalia stools provide comfortable seating overlooking a Boffi kitchen with Miele appliances.



For Joan, an enthusiastic walker, the condominium's downtown location is ideal. "I rarely drive my car anymore," she says. Indeed, she thinks nothing of a seven- or 10-kilometre walk through much of the city that's visible below, over the Lions Gate Bridge, for instance, and into West Vancouver, west to Point Grey or east as far as Commercial Drive.

When she's at home, Joan enjoys her literal bird's-eye view of the traffic, which in this

instance includes floatplanes landing and taking off from the Harbour Air terminal and the bustle surrounding the cruise ships docked under the sails of the Canada Place pier. But the harmony of Dhillon's design means Joan's condominium is always a haven.

Stepping inside from the balcony, Joan declares: "I'm never moving again." ☛

Styling accessories courtesy of *The Cross Décor & Design* and *Provide Home*.

Designed in 2005 by Vancouver's Omer Arbel, the cast-glass 14 Series Bocci chandelier is already regarded as a classic. The grand piano, one of the few pieces homeowner Joan Lew brought with her when she moved in, divides the formal and informal seating areas. The LZF Link floor lamp is a confection of wood veneer strips by Irish designer Ray Power.

