



Sayher Heffernan

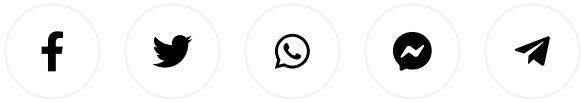
INTERIORS

Inside Corinne Ng’s brutalist style home with monolithic structures

BY LUO JINGMEI

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Creative consultant Corinne Ng takes refuge from the outside world in her gorgeous home, drawing inspiration from trips to London and Tokyo to shape her safe space



For the past three years, Corinne Ng has had an alternative scenery for her [Instagram](#) pictures, one that is antithetical to the glamorous sartorial context of her career in fashion. Cement-shrouded wheelbarrows, scuffed metal scaffolding, concrete floors caked in debris and dust, and dangling wires in the ceiling—this is the construction site of her new house built from the ground up and designed by architect Edmund Ng.

Now that the [house](#) has been completed, photographs of her wielding a hard hat on site visits have been replaced with shots showing the proud homeowner poised in her abode—sometimes lounging on a Cassina [armchair](#); in a frock ready for a dinner party; flushed but still fashion-forward after a workout; or sipping tea or spirits under the moonlight. The concrete-and-steel construct, with dominant hues of smoke and ebony, is the perfect backdrop to the joyous colours and shapely silhouettes she veers toward in her dressing choices.

Corinne’s illustrious fashion career has honed a strong and sure direction in good taste

There is no dearth of style in this house, to no surprise. Corinne’s illustrious fashion career has honed a strong and sure direction in good taste. For over 20 years, she has helmed teams in various publication companies in Singapore, putting out popular fashion titles. She also founded shophthemag—a now-defunct web store promoting luxury [Asian designers](#) such as Malaysian Khoon Hooi. She now runs her own boutique digital marketing agency Contentmrkt while also taking on the role as managing consultant for the Como Group.



The raw concrete wall is a perfect foil for the minimal lines of the furniture such as the Naan dining table designed by Piero Lissoni and Passion dining chairs from Cassina designed by Philippe Starck. Clover, the pet dog, has ample space to run around.

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While her former home was more expressive—“think tree branches suspended from the ceiling with fairy lights,” she describes—here, she deferred to her husband Damien Low’s penchant for dark, industrial and matte surfaces. That is not to say her personal style is absent. “If some parts of the house appear warm, it’s because I vetoed some decisions,” says Corinne. She also has a predilection for brutalist architecture that comes through in the multifarious concrete surfaces and blockish architecture.

“I began to feel more drawn to the beauty of the brutalist style and other monolithic structures. They are austere and imposing but strangely also pure and comforting”

“I was first introduced to the brutalist style as a teenager when my parents brought me to the Barbican Centre in London. I remember thinking how ugly the building was. Later on, with every subsequent visit to London, as well as Tokyo and Antwerp, I began to feel more drawn to the beauty of this and other monolithic structures. They are austere and imposing but strangely also pure and comforting,” she reflects.

Corinne likens her house to a fortress, a protected space for her family to retreat into. But the house feels more intimate than reticent thanks to the balance of light timber flooring and ceilings, as well as the richness of natural light. Her choice of architect was easy. “I knew Edmund through his wife and a friend Jazz Chong, who owns Ode to Art Gallery. I feel it’s important to pick an architect who innately shares your architectural taste. Edmund’s mediums of choice are concrete and metal—the two materials we envisioned for our house. All I had to do was sketch what was in my head, and he refined it and made it look worthy,” says Corinne.



In the study room, a baby grand Essex by Steinway is a well- used instrument by Corinne and Li-En. Corinne customised the marble-topped study table to subtly incorporate slots for laptop cables.

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A tangerine-toned steel facade with a rusted effect softens the fortress metaphor. A laser-cut screen pattern taken literally from the foliage of a tree outside the house filters the light and creates striking shadows. Building her own house was not all smooth running, as Corinne learnt. Plans for a basement were shelved because of cost. The compromise is a series of split-levels that gives the common areas an ambulatory quality. The four- metre-high main door opens to a landing offering two paths: down a short flight of steps into the open-plan kitchen and dining, with the end view of an elevated patio; or up the stairs to the living room. The stretching of spaces and vistas length- and height-wise makes the terrace house feel airy and capacious.

The kitchen as the home’s first encounter may be uncommon but it fits like a glove into this family’s living and social patterns. “It has become the heart of the whole house,” says Edmund, pointing out how the corridor on the second storey—like an observation deck—increases connectivity to the kitchen below. The kitchen is Corinne’s happy place, where the avid cook whips up meals for her family. She had already perfected dishes such as beef bourguignon and shepherd’s pie in her youth. “My mum outsourced the Western dishes to me because she was more of an Asian cook. Hence, a lot of my favourite cuisines are roasts and bakes,” she shares.

She is keen to pass on recipes to her daughters—18-year-old Li-En and 15-year-old Kae-Lin. “Cooking is a skill everyone should learn because it’s handy when you are studying alone, away from home. So I’m currently trying to do a lot of easy one-pot dishes like chicken Provençal or green curry salmon that I can teach them, and they can practise making themselves,” says the doting mother.



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Bonding over meals and cooking is a favourite pastime for Corinne and her daughters on the Dada kitchen counter designed by Vincent Van Duysen.

The generous kitchen counter is well-suited for such sessions. Her family has breakfast here daily. “When the girls come back from school, they perch themselves here for a snack,” says Corinne. When her friends visit on weekends, this becomes a hub of laughter, drinking and enjoying appetisers. “I may cook something on the hob for them, or we stand and wrap our own popiah. Then we settle down in the dining room for major eating,” she discloses.

The kitchen is Corinne’s happy place, where the avid cook whips up meals for her family

A lot of thought went into engineering this comfortable corner. On the Dada kitchen imported from Italy, Corinne installed a biophilic lighting fixture, customised by Maerich, that throws powerful illumination up the tall space, negating the need for ceiling light fixtures. As there is no piped gas in the house, Corinne installed two induction hobs.

Her choice of art lends a touch of exuberance to the grey walls. A red hippopotamus sculpture by Richard Orlinski perches animatedly by the living room window. An expressive painting by Vietnamese artist Van Tho titled ‘The Priest’ hangs by her bedroom door. “I also consider a lot of my fixtures art,” she says, listing an Aria lamp from Slamp and a Sento lettura lamp from Occhio.



Vietnamese artist Van Tho's 'The Priest' brings colour to the space outside Corinne's bedroom.

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While the lower part of the house is more social, upstairs is the private zone. The staircase to the bedrooms is discreetly tucked behind a wall in the living room, closed off with a large door. “That’s where the house ends for guests. The idea is that at night, this becomes our two-storey apartment and nobody else can access it except my family,” explains Corinne. Both her daughters’ bedrooms and her study, where she works half the week, are on the second storey. A black Steinway baby grand sits by the study window, played by Corinne and Li-En. “She’s pop-trained and I’m classically trained, while Kae-Lin is a drummer,” says Corinne of her musical brood.

Between the rooms, a sinewy black steel staircase sculpts its way up to Corinne and Damien’s wing, lit gloriously by a skylight that frames a neat cut-out of the azure sky and wispy clouds on the morning that I visit. “This was a complete challenge to build, as was the skylight. The contractor wanted to do it with two glass panels but Damien insisted on one, and it cracked on the way up,” Corinne recalls. This muddle might faze many homeowners, but not her. Years of dealing with photo shoots that did not go as planned had prepared her for such scenarios. She cites another instance of a miscalculation that changed the perfectly cylindrical spiral staircase design into an angular one. No matter in the end, for it turned out equally enigmatic.



A striking artwork, ‘Seek & Deform’ by Erwin Windu Pranata from Ode to Art, is a focal point at the top of the staircase to the living room.

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Outside her bedroom, a balcony offers unhindered prospects of the nature reserve behind the house. “We made an offer for the house the moment we saw it,” she says on the luxuriant land. The children appreciate it too. “I’ve looked out of my windows to see a whole pack of monkeys, and wild boars with their babies nibbling on the neighbour’s leaves and fruit,” recounts Kae-Lin. Next to the master bedroom, Corinne’s walk-in wardrobe is her quiet place where she works out on her exercise mat. The Molteni&C wardrobe is by Belgian architect Vincent Van Duysen, who also designed the Dada kitchen system. “Van Duysen is a fan of the brutalist style and he advocates the use of pure, natural materials—not entirely possible to practice when you live in humid Singapore. But we like his approach to design,” she says on the minimalist aesthetic.

Another favourite of the couple is Italian architect Piero Lissoni. “Our Naan dining table is a feat of construction by Lissoni for Italian manufacturer Cassina,” she highlights, admiring how the lithe-looking legs can support the robust table. Corinne’s other love for more feminine lines reflect in her admiration for Zaha Hadid and Patricia Urquiola. “The late British-Iraqi Zaha Hadid, I’ve loved forever. Her Aria pendant lamp is made of unbreakable technopolymer but the design is fluid and undulating. You see her architectural approach in this small piece of furniture,” she describes on the

fixture that has an ethereal presence enveloped by dark walls at the staircase from the first storey. As for Urquiola: “It’s not at all my husband’s style. Too bad for him, he just has to live with us eating from her jelly plates,” Corinne chuckles on the Spanish designer’s fun tableware.



On the attic level of the house is the walk- in wardrobe from Molteni & C where Corinne sometimes does her workouts.

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Her attraction for design extends to apparel. “To me, the Italian houses have always had a clear point of view—Moschino, Fendi, Versace, Prada,” she says. Any dramatic flair is kept in check in the house’s interior design “so that my husband doesn’t have to live with what he considers visual cacophony. But with fashion, I’m not sharing it with him so the picks are entirely mine to make. Admittedly, I do sometimes choose things that are gorgeous but unwearable on a daily basis,” she smiles.

The young Corinne had ambioned a fashion career. “But my mother said ‘it won’t earn you a living and you are not talented enough’ so I focused on becoming a writer,” she shares. “I accidently stumbled into fashion publishing, then got hooked on the drama.” Her fashion savvy was inherited from style-conscious parents. “They were not wealthy but always turned up well put together. I remember my father gifting my late mum a Dior bag in the ’80s with his bonus. She kept everything well wrapped. I still have it today. These things shape your approach to fashion. I prefer to buy one well-crafted piece of clothing than 20 pieces that I will throw away in two years.”

The daughters are obviously close to their mother, and the house serves to deepen this bond

Her daughters benefit from her individualistic style. “The good thing about having a mum who loves fashion is that she lets me express myself freely. I have photos of myself wearing the most mismatched outfits as a kid,” quips Kae-Lin. She narrates a family tale about the time when she was five and insisted on click-clacking in Corinne’s Dolce&Gabbana shoes to a mall with Damien. “When I came back, she freaked out because one of the decorative buckles fell out. She made us go back to the mall to search for it but we never found it.”

As for Li-En, Corinne is a trusty sounding board. “I can count on her to tell me honestly if what I’m wearing [doesn’t work]. And growing up, I’ve enjoyed looking at the stuff in her closet. It’s fun to see some of the ridiculous things she owns,” she laughs. The daughters are obviously close to their mother, and the house serves to deepen this bond. Well-

tailored for the family’s needs and passions, it is definitely not cookie-cutter, but nor is it extraneous. Well tempered with moments of eccentric charm best describes it—and its singular host.

Photography Sayher Heffernan
Styling Desmond Lim

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