

Warehouse becomes home office to envy



Patsy Yang

Most often it takes hard work, dedication and perseverance to realize your dreams and, as Monica Bertini found out as she crafted a stylish home out of a former warehouse, the results are worth it.

Over the last six months, the Italian artist has been transforming the gloomy and empty loft space into an inspirational yet minimalistic studio/suite — a “living retreat” for her days in Shanghai.

“After almost six years in Shanghai I had the pleasure to meet Anny Chyn before leaving China. That’s when she shared with me her idea of transforming Anny’s Antique Showroom and Art Gallery off Zhongchun Road into a Chinese traditional culture and retreat center, and how I became part of it,” Bertini said.

Bertini soon started getting involved in this innovative and unique “living concept” which was already in its early stages, making her feel extremely excited by the impressive size of the metamorphosis to take place: 6,000 square meters of showroom turned into the likes of a small provincial village incorporating an antique furniture showroom, studio/apartments, one organic restaurant, a yoga/meditation tatami-room and a spa area.

“It is a platform for all those interested in learning ancient secrets about culture and health. To me, it’s a place of great inspiration,” she said. “Not located in the heart of the city, it will offer the opportunity for a real retreat without interferences.”

When she first saw the building, it was more of a warehouse with no walls in between. Now, there are five studios downstairs and five more structured apartments on the second floor, as a “living retreat” for all visiting guests.

“I started by decorating the interior of my own studio/suite as a pilot project and now I will proceed with

all remaining 10 units to create a ‘boutique-retreat’ concept with a warm, soothing and fulfilling ambience.”

Bertini’s apartment is the result of an exercise of space-making ingenuity. Though small, the 80-square-meter apartment felt roomy, with two bathrooms separating the living and sleeping areas. On the left there is a bedroom, main bathroom and on the other side is the living and dining area combined.

“I believe that open spaces give a thrilling sense of roaming freedom. Depending on the stage of the day, one area becomes more essential than another,” Bertini said.

Highly connected

The bed turns into a daybed where guests can watch movies. The living room is for reading, welcoming friends and working which seem to be so highly connected.

She decided to focus on the furniture and emphasize the open flow of the space. Her goal is to create an integrated feeling throughout the house and a look that is simple yet sophisticated.

Bertini relied on rich vintage and rustic furniture, highlighted the natural hand-woven fabrics and added texture to the mix in the space.

These strategies are evident in the vintage bed and sofa that grace the room, the comfy seating to give each room an inviting appeal and subtly variegated color schemes punctuated with one or two bolder elements.

She custom-designed the major pieces of furniture in each room, ensuring a consistent style and color throughout.

“I believe in bonding contemporary with vintage pieces: past meets future, and I like the warmth of wood in semi-empty minimal, rustic or basic spaces,” she said.

When she started with the H*Chairs, now enriched with titanium tags and embossed diamond, Bertini realized that vintage pieces can be extremely charming,

especially when combined with unusual materials. “And they become powerful, so a neutral environment becomes the perfect formula.”

“I love beds and sofas, for their functionality and symbolism. They can be for relaxing, excitement or intellectual stimulation, and in any case I aim at the ‘one of a kind’ able to transfer an art feeling,” she said.

“We are surrounded by paradoxes and I like to recreate that in my home settings.

“For example, I revisited this 1930s baldachin bed turning it into a two benches living room enriched with *obi* (old Japanese *kimono* belt) details on the pillows and the wood structure.”

It became a sort of installation piece, with the use of fabrics — 60-year-old countryside linen mixed with 100-year old *kimono* belts — making the piece very special.

“I especially cherish the golden era of the 1930s, therefore I used more wood and the colors tend to be warmer: rich hand-woven countryside linen, 1930s Shanghai *qipaos*, vintage Japanese *kimonos* in a timeless repertoire with special furniture, carefully selected for design and proportion, to create a dream-like sensation.”

However, the richness of each element is in no way invading or overpowering its environment. “Less is more. No doubts. I have a natural allergy for all decorative pieces that overwhelm and create disturbance in the space,” Bertini said.

“I know many people have a special attachment to souvenirs. I’ve learnt to keep my special memories and souvenirs in my heart and keep the outside clean,” she said.

Today, beyond having established her living quarters within this space, Bertini is also experiencing all the other elements and aspects available and which characterize the unique concept: communal kitchen space, spa available every day, and a space to exhibit her creations.



Bertini’s products are available at:
Anny’s: annyschina.com; No. 68, Lane 7611, Zhongchun Rd; Tel: 6406-0242
Ews/ Lellisse: ewawangstudio.com; Sihang Depot, Suite 422, 1 Guangfu Rd; Tel: 6381-9938
Hong Merchant: House 3, Lane 372, Xingguo Rd; Tel: 1380-1914-440

Above: Bertini reinterpreted a 1930s baldachin bed into a two benches living room enriched with vintage Japanese *kimono* belt details on the pillows and the wood structure. — Dong Jun



Far left: The 6,000-square-meter antique showroom and art gallery is transformed into a Chinese traditional culture and retreat center, incorporating a furniture showroom, studio/apartments, one organic restaurant, a yoga/meditation tatami-room and a spa area.

Right: The highlight of the vintage bed is the natural, hand-woven fabrics that give the night area a soothing appeal.

Below: The vintage and rustic furniture and accessories make the space inviting, with subtly variegated color schemes punctuated by one or two bolder elements.



THE DESIGNERS

Who is she?

Swiss-born Italian Monica Bertini has lived between Shanghai and Europe for the past six years, having resided in New York and Milan and traveled extensively worldwide. As an art and communication insider, Bertini has acquired and developed conceptual abstract skills that mould with design and fashion.

Her works reflect a passion for contrasts and traditions. In cooperation with international artists, designers and architects, Bertini has participated, as active exponent, in integrated activities of the international art network.

Tell us some of your works and name one you are most proud of:

Past experiences include: a multimedia installation and lifestyle event with music performance, “Room for Dreams” (Artscene China); a video-installation highlighting sound subjective experience leading to misunderstandings and stereotype reactions, “Peas and Shots” (MoCA Shanghai); costume design for “29,” a sonorous, visual and performing arts event, where the stock market oscillations of the crash of 1929 are mathematically transcribed into notes and interpreted by a big jazz band (DOMUS Academy, Milan); a dialogue-installation with Xu Hongmin and Dot Dot Dot Milan, “Stochastic Notes” (Shanghai Biennale); site specific installations with Yuca Ishizuka for the Yokohama Art Triennale and the Shanghai Biennale and a sculpture exhibition “Essence & Paradox” (DUOLUN MoMa).

Are you currently involved with any project?

The latest series of work was launched at KEE Club Shanghai last November: the “H*Chairs,” with original art deco frames and a distinguishing characteristic. They wear 1930s *qipaos* mixed with vibrant silk velvet. Collected with passion and care, these rare *qipaos* get a new life and bring back the spirit of Shanghai retro glam.

With patient and skillful artisan experience learned from Florentine master upholsterers, I chose to revive the old fine crafts and select the best materials for the H*Chairs: coconut and bamboo fibers, horsetail hair, natural latex and cotton. Because details make the difference and traditions inspire timeless quality.

I named each piece with a movie title for their special character which, I feel, tells a story and expresses a mood through colors, shapes and patterns — so, “Gone with the Wind,” “Lust, Caution,” “In the Mood for Love,” “Mary Poppins,” “Casablanca,” “The Lover,” “Shanghai Express” and “Harry Potter,” among the others.

A parallel project is a collection of white ceramic 14-carat gold plated functional sculptures: the “G* Series,” developed in Italy and exhibited at Hong Merchant of Shanghai.

Describe your design style.

I think my works reflect a passion for contrasts and traditions. Materials can be very sensual and I like to play with the five senses to create a total experience. Like old woods mixed with vivid, unexpected materials: the colors (view), the feel (touch), the fragrance (smell) and even the sound.

I find the process of giving a second life to old pieces extremely fascinating. And restyling the past in a contemporary way is not only charming, it also helps preserve the ecosystem. Interaction, creation, destruction and evolution are part of my creative process.

Where are you most creative?

Traveling through time and space and filtering the diverse sensations from all kinds of inspiration ranging from music, art, architecture, literature, movies, food ...

So, from experimental Berlin, “fashionist” Milan, classic Rome, and chic Paris, to a total New York experience, a charming Shanghai, and so on, I believe that empathy enables our energies to reach powerful results.

Dreams, thoughts and ideas can materialize and a positive approach to life in mastering our reality awakes creativity and provides a key to a better system.

What does your home mean to you?

Although a home is the natural extension of oneself, my home is anywhere I feel inspired and comfortable. I chose to keep a base in Shanghai and build my life in Italy, where my home is a place for retreat and creation. It’s always a work in progress where ideas and projects get stabilized and new steps are chosen. I could say a home is a place where we can find peace of mind to live within the flow we choose in order to achieve the desired results.

What do you collect?

Special pieces, both contemporary and antique, range from jewelry to chairs, paintings and small furniture. The rare *qipao* were collected with passion and care and the part of the collection not used to dress the chairs has been restyled with the help of a skillful tailor into 19th century style coats. They hold a new life now and I really feel they bring back the spirit of Shanghai retro glam.

What will be the next big design trend?

An extravagant lifestyle, with creative designs supported by the most updated technology: surrounding AV systems with music anywhere and HD flat screens with control of all the lighting and security from mobile devices.

A truly integrated and wireless connected digital home generated by solar panels with ecologically smart architectural designs. In fashion, the cyberpunk trend, prominent in anime and films, continues to inspire the newer generations.

I came back from Maison & Object Paris and, to my delight, I noticed a new vintage trend: 1920s-1940s revival.

As I said, being a big fan of contrasts, I love the ideas of a futuristic, self-sustainable home, decorated with vintage and contemporary precious furniture.

That would be my home.



A “H*Chair” designed by Monica Bertini.