

COOL QUAY DESIGNS

BY AMY BROOK-PARTRIDGE PHOTOGRAPHY KEN TAN





We invited ourselves over to NAMITA and PRANAY MEHRA's seriously cool Robertson Quay condo to find out how they turned a tired and dated apartment into a home with all the mod cons, including Namita's funky kitchen, where she dreams up the latest creations for her culinary company **The Indian Spicebox**.

Country of origin:

Namita was born in Nigeria and spent her first five years there; Pranay was born and raised in Mumbai.

Size of home:

1,800 square feet, originally four bedrooms now converted to three.

Who lives here:

Namita and husband Pranay, their three-year-old son Shivum and their helper Joy.

Style: Modern with eclectic touches in the soft furnishings and art.

Favourite room:

The living area is Namita's favourite space. The balcony is Pranay's preferred spot, and his favourite things are the couch, where he sits and listens to music, and the bar that holds, among other things, his beloved single malt collection.



The custom-made Hoerboard DJ console takes pride of place, and is one of Pranay's favourite possessions. Although he's now senior vice-president of ecommerce at SingPost, he was formerly a New York DJ, and music forms a major link between father and son. "Shivum loves music and says he wants to be a DJ too."

When I arrive at Namita and Pranay's apartment, the front door is wide open, helping to direct the breeze from the lift lobby through to the large, open-plan living-dining space and out across the balcony. The couple's son Shivum is fast asleep on the sofa; it's been a tough week for him, having only recently undergone a tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy, so it's no surprise he's taking an afternoon snooze. Tentatively starting up a conversation with Namita, I hope not to wake up the recovering patient, but Namita is soon talking animatedly about her recently published children's book, *The Magic Spicebox*, as well as the many other pies she seems to have her fingers in, including the recent purchase and renovation of their home by the river.

New York to Singapore

Namita and Pranay arrived in Singapore five years ago, following a ten-year stint in New York where she worked for an advertising agency and then as a marketer for Facebook. However, the distance between herself and her mother in India began to take its toll. "I felt disconnected from family, and I really wanted to be closer to them." When a role within Facebook's Singapore office came up, she jumped at the chance.

For the first two years, the couple lived in the River Valley area, in a new and contemporary apartment. "It was tiny, but we loved it there. The location, being so close to Great World City, was super-convenient, and we love this neighbourhood. I would walk along the river when I was pregnant with Shivum, if only to get to Laurent Bernard for ice cream at the other end!"

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ABOVE

The cupboards behind the dining area store a multitude of things, including a funky backlit bar. The spider dining table is from Molecule. "We wanted real wood but in the end opted for veneer, mainly for the maintenance aspect."

LEFT The kitchen fittings are by Dream and the backsplash from Rice. Namita admits it's small, but she has done it up exactly as she'd want her dream kitchen to look: "From the marble backsplash to the white Shaker cabinets and the under-counter lighting, its cuteness and perfectness make up for its small size!" It also has a touch-sensitive tap in the ceramic sink and some clever storage to maximise the space. "The combination of the latest technology plus space optimisation and clever minimal storage solutions are general themes throughout my home."





When Shivum was born in March 2013 and they realised they were going to need more space, they veered towards the other end of the spectrum, deciding on an old but huge condo next to the Tanglin Club. “It suited us at the time and we also loved it, but we did miss River Valley.”

Coming to the end of their next lease, and with the housing market looking more favourable for buyers, Namita and Pranay decided to start looking for a home to buy. “We started casually, but in the end I must have seen around 50 properties. When this unit came up, our realtor warned me that it was much smaller than we had anticipated and the interior was not in good shape. Although it was hard to visualise at first, there was an energy about the place when we first stepped in.”

As the property was within their budget, including renovations, within 24 hours the decision to buy was made. “We know this condo is very rentable; it’s so family-friendly, and the location couldn’t be better. Right now it’s our home – but we are always on the lookout for the next adventure.”

Rivergate renovations

The couple called on the help of their friend Gaurang Khemka, who owns architecture firm URBNarc. “We didn’t think he’d be interested in a residential project, as he focuses primarily on commercial work such as the gorgeous Alila Resort in Bali, but to our delight he agreed.”

The condo’s style is a combination of Namita, Pranay and Gaurang’s creative visualisations. “My husband and I have quite different tastes: his is very visual, very creative, quite crisp, cool and modern; I’m more eclectic; and Gaurang’s style is very modern, clean and Zen. We went through an intense three-month design process, with plenty of great discussions, and some disagreement on things like built-ins, concealing televisions and the choice of materials, but in the end we collaborated like crazy and ultimately trusted him. Our home looks shockingly like his original designs!”

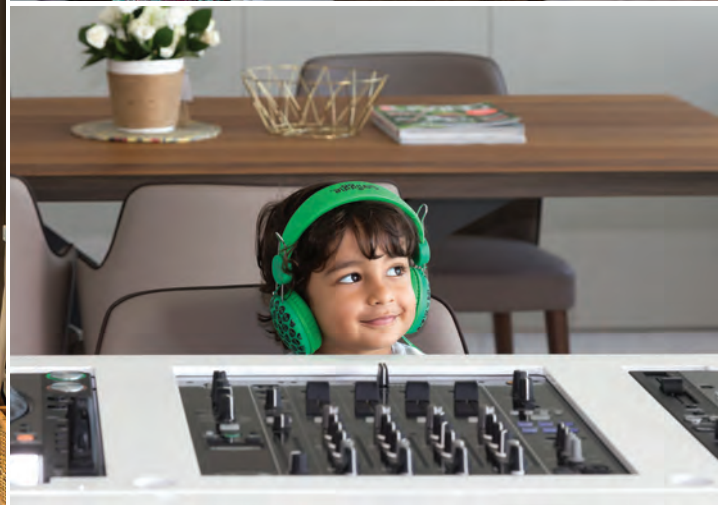
Namita admits she researched intensively, spending over 200 hours looking into every part of the décor and design, from sending Gaurang Pinterest images

CLOCKWISE

In the hallway, the subway picture (made in aluminium) is from New York, and is by Parvez Taj.

“The Ganeshas are from my mother in India. Ganesha is the remover of obstacles and I feel that these two have been very lucky for us.”

Namita and Pranay are particularly proud of this MF Hussein carpet artwork on the wall.





ABOVE
Shivum's room has an "up in the air" theme. Namita ordered the posters from an artist on Etsy.

OPPOSITE
The closets are from Dream. "They can hold so much - Dream did a great job of maximising the space." Namita says their ensuite master bathroom looks just like the Pinterest picture she sent their architect.



"Although it was hard to visualise at first, there was an energy about the place when we first stepped in."

for design ideas to sourcing taps and tiles. "We were very involved; it's been a real labour of love. Pranay is the decision-maker, while I'm the researcher."

Having purchased the apartment in July last year, the family moved in in November – an impressive feat, Namita agrees, especially considering that the entire apartment was gutted and one of the four bedrooms opened up to allow for a large, open-plan living space.

Books and cooks

The couple found out that Namita was pregnant exactly a year after arriving in Singapore. "After having Shivum, I did go back to work for three months, but then I couldn't bear to be away from him. I felt like I'd put my career first for a really long time, and as my job involved a lot of travelling I struggled with being away from my baby."

She took a position with a venture capital firm for six months. "While there I met lots of founders and entrepreneurs, and that gave me a real buzz. By the time I left I'd written two business plans."

She had in fact already started up a Facebook page for The Indian Spicebox in 2009, which had gained quite a following. The idea behind it was to make Indian cooking at home accessible to everyone, by sharing recipes and ideas. Then, in November 2014, Namita launched her Spicebox set, a box packed with some of the essential spices needed for cooking Indian food at home – part of the proceeds of sales go to fund meals for street children in India. She also self-published her own cookbook, *Cooking with Indian Spicebox*, and her children's book *The Magic Spicebox* was recently published by Scholastic. Then there are her cooking classes at The Providore's cooking studio in PasarBella.

So what's next for Namita? Apart from recently becoming a regular blogger on the Huffington Post, she has her sights on publishing more books. "Another one is inevitable, to be honest; I actually have the idea already, looking at spices from around the world, and mixing food and travel, which are both huge passions of mine."



Recommendations

HOME & INTERIORS

URBNarc
25B Kreta Ayer Road
6222 7600 | urbnarc.com/en

XTRA (multiple locations)
xtra.com.sg

Rice
213 Henderson Road,
#01-03
6692 1199 | rice-fields.com

Dream
456 River Valley Road
6235 0220 | dream.com.sg

Hoe Kee Hardware ("for the best selection of Blanco Silgranit sinks")
8 Genting Road,
The Blue Building
6749 4521 | hoekee.com.sg

Grohe ("they were so patient, and amazing to work with")
grohe.com/sg

Exquisite Builders ("our fantastic building contractors")
80 Playfair Road
6358 2556

FOOD AND DRINKS

Coriander Leaf
#02-01 Chijmes,
30 Victoria Street
6837 0142 | corianderleaf.com

Spago
Tower 2 Level 57 Marina Bay Sands, 10 Bayfront Avenue
6688 9955 | marinabaysands.com

Cufflink Club
6 Jiak Chuan Road
9694 9623 | thecufflinkclub.com

Laurent Bernard ("just one of our Robertson Quay favourites")
#01-11 The Pier at Robertson Quay,
80 Mohamed Sultan Road
6235 9007 | laurentbernard.com.sg

The Indian Spicebox
info@indian-spicebox.com
indianspicebox.com

SHOPPING

The Providore
#02-K1 PasarBella at The Grandstand,
200 Turf Club Road
theprovidore.com

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